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**Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi**

**(Turkestan-Kazakhstan)**

Yasawi, a distinguished Central Asian Sufi master, died in 1166. An outstanding mausoleum erected over his grave by conqueror Timur in 1397/98, not been subjected to any major changes, is a genuine architectural achievement of the Timurid period, declared as "World Heritage Site" by UNESCO and protected as Kazakhstan National Monument. The religious structure continues to draw pilgrims from across Central Asia and all over the world.

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1. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ahmed-Yesevi
2. https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1103/

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# AMERICAN INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIAN REGION DURING 2001-2015: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

**Faisal Javaid***

## Abstract

*After 9/11, the Central Asian region got Geo-strategic and geopolitical attention to the United States of America. Initially, Russia, China, and the leaders of regional states criticized the attacks and welcomed America in the region. The landlocked region has enormous energy resources and its border attached to Afghanistan, China, Russia, and the Caspian Sea. American policymakers gave special importance to this region. So, America established Airbases to fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and invested billions of dollars in different areas. After social revolutions in the region, the leaders of Central Asia states, Russia and China viewed America as a threat. This article examines American interests in the Central Asian region after announcing the war against terrorism and also investigates the strategic importance of the Central Asian region for America.*

**Keywords:** American Interests, Security Interests, Energy Interests, Political Interests, Central Asian region

## Introduction

In the instant consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union, in late 1991 America has quickly identified the states' independence of new Central Asia. These establishments of diplomatic bindings with the countries of Central Asia were first by any country.[1] Customarily, the region of Central Asia had been under the power of the Soviet Union. Through its fall down, America recognized the prospect of growing its geopolitical power in this region. Still, without any past basis in this region, the existence of the

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[1] Elizabeth Wishnick, *Growing U.S. Security Interests in Central Asia*, (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, October 2002), 3.

U.S was noticed by the states of Central Asia as that of a stranger.[2] This region had immense capability related to energy and was tactically significant, but it was surrounded by land, which set hurdles for the U.S to enter and involve there.

Following the year 1991, support by America in the favor of the Central Asian region had four aspects the support of a democratic system, the formation of open market finances, the funding of peace and collaboration inside and amongst the states of this region, and their assimilation with the superior global society.[3] It was safeguarding the autonomy, sovereignty and territorial reliability of Central Asia was the keystone of the policy adopted by America[4] The primary safety concern for the U.S in this region throughout the mid-1990s sustained the safeguarding of chemical, biological and nuclear arms of the previous Soviet Union. Creating on the flourishing cooperative threat reduction (CTR) accord with Kazakhstan, the U.S approved a CTR with Uzbekistan about a natural arms study capacity.[5] The U.S paid attention to shielding adjacent to safety hazards that were based over the long term rather than prevarication not in favor of more looming hazards.

## Literature Review

### Central Asia: A Region of Strategic Importance to America

Post-Soviet Union crumple, in the year 1991, the United States was required to assist the lately sovereign Central Asian countries to build up financially and politically.[6] The initial decade of the sovereignty of Central Asia, the center spotlight of policies, and the main concerns of America had mainly been determined by energy. This spotlight was also described in a geopolitical perspective, zero-sum, with stress on protecting paths of export beside a cautiously built tactical map meant at avoiding Russia and isolating the Islamic Republic of Iran. Throughout the decade of the 1990s, the endorsement of Turkey as a worth of proxy strength of American in the

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[2] Michael A. Peterson, China's great game in Central Asia implications to U.S. policy in the region" (Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey California, September 2005), 49.

[3] Strobe Talbott, (U.S. Deputy Secretary of State). A Farewell to Flashman. Address at *the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies,* (Washington, D.C., July 21, 1997).

[4] Frank Csongos, Sestanovich, Stephen (former NIS Ambassador-at-Large) said on Central Asia: Official Outlines U.S. Policy. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 17March, 1999).

[5] Strobe Talbott, A Farewell to Flashman.

[6] MAJ Jonathan Dunn,. "Rethinking American Strategy in Central Asia." Paper presented at *the Midwest Political Science Association 67th Annual National Conference*, (The Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, 2 April, 2009), 1.

region was also intended to boost larger geopolitical objects to counter Iran and Russia and agitation for pro-western and secular democratization.[7]

Dramatic changes came to Central Asia in 2001, following the terrorist hazards in America. These located the area at the front line of the battle next to terrorism, spiritual extremism, and trafficking of arms. As a result of the incident of 9/11, entire Central Asia offered help in one shape or another to the USA and alliance armed in Afghanistan, which resulted that Washington seriously extending its tactical existence in the region of Central Asia. In an expansion that would have appeared not possible a few years before, armed troops of the U.S were positioned at airbases of Uzbek and Kyrgyz. Shortly, numerous other governments around the globe started to revise their attitude about Central Asia as a region of tactical significance. With the richness of gas, oil, and other resources, this region participated as a vital function in such re-examinations.[8]

The combat against the terror had increased the tactical significance of the region of Central Asia in Washington, but it had not led to dramatic changes in the security environment in the region. The American military presence, combined with ensured access to the region's reserves, defines the strategic significance of countries of Central Asia to the United States and concerns about the county's stability had been secondary to Bush administration strategists. In the late year 2001 and most of the year 2002, leaders of the America and the Western discussed an enormously regarding the significance of augmented engagement by the regional republics and the requirements for global monetary organizations to effort extra strongly with these states to assist them to manage with the unsettled progress disputes that were brought owing to the crumble of the Soviet Union and sovereignty.[9]

Unquestionably tactical significance of Central Asia in worldwide matters was rising. In the year 2004, Assistant Secretary Craner gave evidence that the Central Asian region has a key tactical significance for the U.S,[10] Beijing, and Moscow differs from the perception of every nation of its tactical benefits. Washington paid attention mainly to the Central Asian region as a significant theater in the combat against terrorism. Besides, it was out looking like a theater where America may contradict a revitalized

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[7] Richard Giragosian, "The Strategic Central Asian Arena." *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, 4(1), 2006, 140.

[8] Peter Roudik, *The History of the Central Asian Republics.* (USA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 8.

[9] Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's Second Chance.* (Washington, D.C,: Carnegie Endowment, 2005), 173.

[10] Lorne W. Craner, (Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor). "*Testimony to the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe*." (Helsinki Commission Hearing, June 24, 2004).

China or Russia, or a position to dull every addition of influence of Iran.[11] At present, the strategic importance of Central Asia was closely linked to its significance to Afghanistan's security. The security developments in Afghanistan shape the American orientations not just toward Afghanistan, but moreover toward the Central Asian region.[12]

The region of Central Asia played a vital role in America's Afghan strategy. Amongst the three states from five of Central Asia were attached to Afghanistan by their borders. A firm Afghanistan relies on the sustained help of its neighbor states of Central Asia just as a firm, the wealthy outlook for the states of Central Asia relies on adopting a peaceful environment, steadiness, and wealth back to their instant neighbor Afghanistan. The Central Asian countries were before then had been doing the participation much too global endeavors in Afghanistan. For instance, Kabul had been provided electricity by Uzbekistan which was its core need. The Manas Transit Center Global Airport in Kyrgyzstan was a vital logistical center for transporting the workforce and for refilling activities. Turkmenistan offered civilized help while over-flight permission was provided by Tajikistan. Civilized support was made available by Kazakhstan, and it had declared a new program valued at $50 million to teach students of Afghanistan in the universities of Kazakhstani. And the Northern Distribution Network started to become a crucial way to get the supplies inside Afghanistan for allied powers.[13]

## American Interests in the Central Asian region

The Central Asian region had been a seriously significant area for several U.S tactical concerns. Even if the importance of the region for the U.S mounted radically following the terrorist hazards of 9/11, American concerns in the area were surely not a fresh happening. After the USSR's disintegration in the year 1991, the U.S wanted to assist the recently sovereign states of the Central Asian region to expand equally financially and politically. Following the 9/11 hazards, the region of Central Asia came up as a main center for the U.S as it started its early assaults in the International Combat against Terrorism to depose the Taliban factor in Afghanistan.[14] The U.S was capable to employ its armed and political

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[11] Stephen Blank, "The Strategic Importance of Central Asia: An American View". Parameters, U.S. Army War College, 38(1), (spring 2008), 73.

[12] Tanrisever, O. *Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security since 9/11*. (Netherlands: IOS Press, 2013), 152.

[13] George A Krol, (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, Department of State). "Reevaluating U.S. Policy in Central Asia." *Hearing before the subcommittee on near Eastern and South and Central Asian affairs of the committee on Foreign Relations*, (111th Congress, First Session, December 15, 2009). (Washington D, C.,:U.S. Government printing office, 2010), 9-10.

[14] MAJ Jonathan Dunn, "*Rethinking American Strategy*." 1.

bindings with the states of Central Asia to bring in onward basing for armed forces exercise in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan (with extra entrance to airspace and limited utilization of bases in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan) in its war to confront the terror in operation named enduring freedom.[15] Anti-terrorism had turned out to be the vital spotlight of the policy of the U.S in this region, though other objectives still exist as significant; the U.S had ongoing concern and existence in the Central Asian region of a type that it could not have even dreamed of such before".[16]

Following the collapse of Taliban groups, preventing the hazard of terrorism stayed the main American concern in Central Asia. The significant position of the states of Central Asia participated in offering a passage for humanitarian aid consignments to Afghanistan and in assisting the alliance in making efforts against terrorism. In December 2001, evidence to Senate Sub-Committee[17] and in October 2003 in evidence to Congress, the U.S had three sets of concerns associated with the region of Central Asia: 1) safety; 2) energy; 3) financial and political development. In the safety area, the spotlight was on anti-terrorism, non-propagation, and fighting drug trafficking originating from this region. The energy was vital to the U.S, guaranteeing consistent and financially feasible way into worldwide marketplaces and the exercise of energy incomes to endorse maintainable growth. Financial and Political modification spotlighted movement in the direction of open-minded democracy and market-oriented transforms. Since the incident of 9/11 U.S tactical concerns in the Central Asian region had spotlighted anti-terrorism, particularly the removal of the pressure of terrorists and other threatening factions.[18]

America had significant concerns to promote stability, wealth, security, human rights, and financial and political reforms in the Central Asian region. The financial development and democratic political progress of the region can generate a further resilient constancy and more dependable associates for America in dealing with the universal yet serious worldwide challenges, from non-propagation to counter-narcotics to safety of energy.

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[15] Elizabeth Wishnick, *Strategic Consequences of the Iraq War: U.S. Security Interest in Central Asia Reassessed*. (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, Army Staff War College, May 2004), 13.

[16] Vernon Loeb, "Footprints in Steppes of Central Asia; New Bases Indicate U.S. Presence Will Be Felt After Afghan War." *The Washington Post*, (February 9, 2002), A9.

[17] A. Elizabeth Jones, (Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs). "U.S.-Central Asian Cooperation." (Washington, DC: Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Central Asia and the Caucasus, 13 December, 2001), 9.

[18] A. Elizabeth Jones, (Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs). "*Central Asia: Developments and the Administration's Policy*." *Testimony before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia*, (House of Representatives Committee on International Relations, 29 October, 2003).

The enormous energy resources of Central Asian states were vital for global wealth, guaranteeing a variety of sources and transportation ways, while also bringing new financial possibilities in this region itself.[19]

America's primary objectives seemed to wean the countries of Central Asia away from the influence of Russia and deny access to China from regional energy resources. In proportion to the statement of Mr. State Steven Mann, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary that institutions like NATO would carry on illustrating the Central Asian nations nearer to America and Europe, while America also supported the countries to expand new synergies and bindings with the southern countries, for instance, Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.[20]

Washington wanted to stop a Russian largely energy domination from shaping in the oil sell with substantial accomplishment, while it had had a lot fewer achievements regarding natural gas. Concurrently, the U.S wanted to segregate Iran from the energy of Central Asia by advising countries to assemble channels that go around Iran and imposing various sanctions upon those countries and organizations that found doing trade with Iran.[21] The U.S sustained support from the governments of Pakistan, China, and India to generate substitutes to the Russian energy-transportation control by making new energy transportation paths such as railroads, shipping lines, and pipelines.

## America's Security Interests in the Central Asian Region

The main security interests of the U.S in the Central Asian region were around counterterrorism, nonproliferation, combating drug trafficking, and regional security. The steadiness in the region of Central Asia was of supreme significance and essential national concerns of the U.S".[22] The thorough Islamic fundamentalism and violence could have destabilized this region. Counterterrorism was the main American concern in the Central Asian region for presence in the region. The 9/11 incident very much distorted the American customary safety notion and its safety plan. The hazard of global terrorism increased to be the mainly vital safety hazard to America and counterterrorism turned out to be the middle American tactical

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[19] George A. Krol, "*Reevaluating U.S. policy*." 13.

[20] Steven Mann, (Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs). Assessing Energy and Security Issues in Central Asia. *Testimony to U.S. House of Representatives Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, One Hundred ninth Congress 2nd session,* (25 July, 2006), 19-27.

[21] Stephen Blank, *U.S. Interests in Central Asia and the Challenges to Them.* (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, Army War College, March 2007), 4-5.

[22] Richard Armitage (Deputy Secretary of State). In Nichols, Jim. "Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests." *Congressional Research Service, report for congress,* (10 December, 2004), 3.

anxiety. The Central Asian region was an appropriate geographic region to strike global terrorism. Counterterrorism was a long-standing responsibility and the Central Asian region, had not vanished its political and geographical purpose in the American quest of global counterterrorism.[23]

America was greatly devoted to Afghanistan and its commitment there and in the states of Central Asia was a long-standing effort. The prospect of this region had substantial comportment on the growth of the International War against the Terrorism and generally on American safety concerns in the Central Asian region; the preservation of way into airspace and land in the Centre of Asia; the progress of substitute sources of energy and the furthering of liberty and democratic progress.[24]

American required, facilitating countries of Central Asia have faced their safety hazards since, with no steadiness and safety, there would have not been any major investment in this region.[25] The two mainly significant safety hazards in the Central Asian region where Islamic fundamentalist violence and trafficking of drugs. Inherent in serving the Central Asian region addressed both these dangers were endeavoring to augment boundary protection. All the great exterior authorities America, Russia, and China allocated a mutual concern to counter the danger of Islamic fundamentalist violence and combating the trade of drugs. Both SCO and NATO also had a concern in confronting terrorism and the trade of drugs; again, collaboration among both safety organizations to tackle these shared dangers could have been welcomed in the region of Central Asia.[26]

## America's Energy Interests in the Central Asian Region

Access to Energy had been a vital concern in Central Asia for the United States to relate to both oil and natural gas. Energy was important to the United States, guaranteeing consistent and reasonably feasible access to worldwide marketplaces and the employment of incomes of energy to encourage maintainable growth. It did not just since it sought to expand its sources of energy, but also because untied access to the huge resources of the energy of the Central Asian region would assist the region to uphold its sovereignty.[27]

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[23] Zhao Huasheng, "China, Russia and the United States: Prospects for Cooperation in Central Asia." *The Journal of the China-Eurasia Forum (CEF) Quarterly*, (February 2005), 29-30.

[24] Svante E. Cornell, and Swanström, Niklas. "The Eurasian Drug Trade: A Challenge to Regional Security." *Problems of Post-Communism*, 53(4), (June 2006), 24-25.

[25] Zeyno Baran, "Assessing Energy and Security Issues in Central Asia." Testimony to the House of Representatives Committee on International Relations, (Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, 25 July, 2006), 9.

[26] MAJ Jonathan Dunn, "*Rethinking American Strategy*." 14.

[27] MAJ Jonathan Dunn, "*Rethinking American Strategy*." 4-5.

America maintained a concern in the growth of resources of energy in the region of Central Asia and that lots of other republics mean to American concerns had their interests regarding this region and it developed into apparent that the Central Asian region had the latent to be seriously significant to Washington.[28] America's major concerns in the Central Asian region had been the endeavor to achieve entrance for American firms to energy investigation, cleansing, and promotion prospects in this region.[29] America looked for augmented growth and diversification of the resources of energy resources of this region and protected pipeline courses that go around Russia. A number of the biggest hydrocarbon deposits in the globe were originated in the region of Central Asia and billions of dollars had already been spent developing the gigantic regional fields.[30]

## America's Political Interests in the Central Asian Region

American Interests in the Central Asian region still rotate in the region of the three extensive ideas of financial and political reform, energy, and safety.[31] As far as the fields of financial and political reforms were concerned, America paid attention to democratization and progress towards open market monitors. A key cause for the interests of America associated with Central Asia worries the impending collapse of financial and political growth in this region.[32] On 24, October 1992 the Freedom Support Act[33] was passed by the American Senate that laid the establishment for versatile support of the states of Central Asia. Though its spotlight was on democratization endeavors and developing open marketplaces, it also dealt with safety and humanitarian matters.

American major tactical objectives in Central Asia were to observe the progress of sovereign, elected, and steady republics, dedicated to the type of financial and political reform that was necessary for recent societies and on the course to incorporate and into the global financial system.[34] America had stressed that safeguarding, steadiness, and affluence in the region was connected to financial and democratic reforms, vigorous esteem for the rule of regulation, and human rights. It would have desired to notice

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[28] Olga Oliker, and David Shlapak, *A U.S. Interests in Central Asia Policy Priorities and Military Roles.* (California: RAND Corporation, 2005), 19-32.

[29] Annette Bohr, *Central Asia: responding to the multi-vectoring game.* (Malaysia: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 113.

[30] George A. Krol, "*Reevaluating U.S. policy*." 14.

[31] A. Elizabeth Jones, "*U.S.-Central Asian Cooperation*."

[32] Olga Oliker, and David A. Shlapak, *U.S. Interests in Central Asia.* 2.

[33] United States Congress. *Humanitarian assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States: from emergency relief to long-term self-sufficiency: hearing before the International Task Force of the Select Committee on Hunger, House of Representatives, One Hundred Second Congress, second session, hearing held in Washington, DC, April 27, 1992.* (Washington D.C: U.S. G.P.O., 1992), 202-215.

[34] Lorne W. Craner, "*Testimony to the U.S. Commission on Security*."

the expansion of free media, growth of civil society, and political pluralism. These objectives could be attained via a changeover to democratic ethics and open marketplace progress in every state of Central Asia.

## Research Methodology

This study used the qualitative method and examined the relevant data. The study also considered secondary sources such as research papers, books, think tank reports and electronic sources, and primary documents such as high official interviews, policy reports.

## Findings and Discussions

It finds that America quickly established diplomatic relations with all autonomous Central Asian states after the fall of the Soviet Union. It also analyzes that America wanted to increase its influence through Turkey and other Muslim Countries coming out of this region from Russia, but it failed in this, and the regional states went to the Russian orbit. The main reason behind this is the Central Asian region is a landlocked area where is no direct connection and the regional states are dependent on neighboring states especially Russia and China.

It observes that America wanted to safeguard or remove the nuclear and biological weapons from the Central Asian states, just after their independence, as there had been some nuclear testing sites in that region. America has started a program against it and aided millions of dollars under this program and, Russia and regional states also cooperated with it. This study investigates that the Central Asia region and the United States have much to benefit from each other. The United States has much to gain from the partnership with this region, as does Central Asia with the United States. The United States has many economic benefits from the cooperation of the Central Asia region, but it goes much deeper than that.

It investigates that the Central Asian states are rich with natural resources, especially with oil and gas in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. For this purpose, these states are fully dependent on Russia, their energy structure was established during the Soviet era. It also finds that America supported those projects such as Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) and the trans-Caspian gas pipeline, which were bypassing Russia but due to several reasons these projects could not complete. It also finds that America was unsuccessful in non-Russian energy pipelines from Central Asia and its main objective was preventing the regional states away from Russian influence.

It observes that America could not break the Russian monopoly in the Central Asian region. Russia declared this region as its backyard and since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Russian focus has been increased especially during the Putin era. After these attacks, the Central Asian region got significance for regional and global powers. The leaders of Central

Asian states, Russia and China welcomed and supported American terrorist operations and gave access to American humanitarian operations to Afghanistan. Therefore, America established military bases, and this was a golden opportunity for Americans in this region.

It finds that America has been impatient to the point that it committed a strategic error. When America has been supporting the Color Revolution (the events in Andijan and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, sharply raised American intervention in the internal affairs of the country) to change the political framework in Central Asian nations, and it advanced democratization in the district in an excessively incredible way. Actualities have demonstrated that the Color Revolution model is not appropriate for this region. The leaders of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan had strongly resisted political change and have successfully adopted internal political mechanisms with varying styles to stay in power.

This examination shows that Russia and China have kept up the impact to keep the norm, meanwhile it is the best ensure of their survival. Any idea of the democratization of these nations can come just from the West. On the off chance that it does, it will bring the administrations of Central Asian nations much closer to Russia and China. American rejection from Uzbekistan resembled a geopolitical triumph. Because of the color revolutions, they attained wide concurrence on the need for administration security and the need to breakpoint the long-haul military existence of America in Central Asia. These are additionally two key ranges characterizing the political way of Central Asian republics and securing a vital place in the area where the United States ends up in rivalry with Russia and China.

The research explains that the CSTO and the SCO seek to protect the regional status quo. These organizations do not necessarily pose a threat to American interests in this region. But it has the potential to be an anti-American bloc.

This study examines that American influence has been declining in Central Asia. The primary reason was the American strategies and actions in the area; second, China and Russia took America as a threat and try to reduce American influence in the region; third, political unrest in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. America should reexamine its policies in the last three decades and why those policies were not fruitful? To date, and in almost every administration, America has neglected to attain a key destination in Central Asia.

It observes that America could not be far away from regional energy resources and trade from Iran. Iran and China expect that America did not only focus on operations against militants but its military vicinity and security also engage in the range that has a dual reason for regulation and encirclement.

It finds that America's main interests in the Central Asian region; were security, energy, and political and economic developments. American security interests in Central Asia were the war against terrorism, the fight against drug trafficking and nonproliferation, and the focus on regional stability and safety. Its energy-related interests are investments in energy projects, managing energy resources, and it's export to the world market. American economic and political related interests have consisted of; promoting pro-western and secular democratization, encouraging the free media, supporting civil society, sponsoring human rights, reforms in political and economic institutions. It finds that there were not any prominent relations between NATO and regional organizations (SCO, CSTO, and EUAEU) to achieve its regional interests and objectives.

## Conclusion

Following the 9/11 attacks, the region of Central Asia came up as a center for American foreign policy as it started its early assaults in international combat against terrorism to depose the Taliban factor in Afghanistan. The significant position of the states of Central Asia participated in offering a passage for humanitarian aid consignments to Afghanistan and in assisting the alliance in making efforts against terrorism. The region had been a seriously significant area for several American tactical concerns. This region had immense capability related to energy and was purposefully significant, but it was surrounded by land, which set hurdles for America to enter and involve there. America had three sets of interests associated with the region of Central Asia: 1) safety; 2) energy; 3) financial and political development. America's primary objective seemed to wean the countries of Central Asia away from the influence of Russia. After the tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan and events in Andijan, Uzbekistan, the United States didn't maintain its position and couldn't achieve its objectives in the Central Asian region.

## Recommendations

In the light of research, analysis this study has the following recommendations:

- Any regional or global power cannot categorically control the Central Asian region and solved its issues alone, it is recommended that the United States should take steps for confidence-building measures for the regional powers; however, it could achieve its goals in this region.
- It has been found that Russia has established its dominance on energy resources in Central Asia and the regional states' economy; therefore, it is recommended that America continues to encourage the Indian, Chinese and Pakistani Governments and creates

alternatives to the Russian energy transit monopoly by establishing new energy transit routes.

- It evaluates that America has been supported and encouraged civil societies, NGO's and media outlets, in a result, Central Asian states such as Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan faced political unrest, after these regional states have concerns about chaos or regime change. So in the light of research analysis, it is recommended that America should support democratic values and civil societies; it must find a way without triggering fear of regime change among the authoritarian leaders.
- It has been observed that none of the American Presidents visited the Central Asia states after their independence till now; the study recommended that America should upgrade the series of high-level visits by the President and cabinet members; to build better relations with the Central Asian states.
- It has also been found that there is a competition of power among America, Russia, and China in the region; Russia and China desire to limit American influence in Central Asia. America should not square off against China and Russia simultaneously; as some areas of China and Russia are in rivalry with each other, especially in the energy domain, it is better to revisit the American policies regarding this region.

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# EURASIAN UNION: OVERCOMING INSTITUTIONAL VACUUM

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**Abstract**

*The relations among the states of the Post-Soviet region had characterized predominantly by bilateral regulations rather than multilateralism. Russia appeared to be at the center of relations while the other nations had little economic, political, or military ties with post soviet states. The institutions created in the Post-Soviet space turned fragile from regional integrity, conflict management, and further development. When it came to the institutional preferences of the Post-Soviet countries, they were very diverse, given the willingness of extra-regional organizations such as the EU, NATO, and others to penetrate the region. Thus, the regional states had little to do together, let alone create a high-level regional organization, except for their close ties with Russia. Moreover, in its turn, Russia relied on regulating its relations with regional states on a bilateral basis. Then, the central puzzle is how to explain the emerging multilateralism in the form of the Eurasian Economic Union, considering the bilateralism between the states of the Post-Soviet region? We argue that the Eurasian Union is designed to overcome the institutional vacuum in the Post-Soviet region to reduce the regional countries' institutional manoeuvrability and maintain the region's geopolitical integrity by managing high interdependence between regional states.*

**Keywords:** Russia, Post-Soviet region, Eurasian Union, Institutional vacuum

## Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the region was characterized by the emergence of multilateral institutions from one side. Secondly,

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institutional orientations of regional states have been diverse from the perspective of available institutional options such as the North Atlantic Tearty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). Under the condition of the former significant interdependence and high level of relations within a single state, new institutional frameworks were required to provide relations regulations under new regional and international political reality and power configurations considering the relative decline of Russia and deepening conflicts between regional states. However, new intra-regional institutions were the spontaneous result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the diverse foreign policy orientations of newly independent states. It created a power vacuum and ineffectiveness of new institutions under conditions of a large variety of ethnic, political and economic conflicts between regional states and also the desire to be involved in the international system and the need for guidance on that way from authoritative international actors provided the willingness of Western powers to move into the sphere of former-Soviet influence led these states to establish close relations with institutions formed in Euro-Atlantic[1] region during and after the Cold War. Moreover, these institutions adjusted their policy considering new political reality and membership policy in the relations with Eastern European and Post-Soviet states.

The EU and NATO tried to engage the states of the Post-Soviet region in institutional processes. The NATO response was the elaboration of the concept of partnership. In 1994 the "Partnership for Peace" program was intitiated with the ideao of integrating the Centeral and Eastern European (CEE) states with post-Soviet states which might be able to cooperate with Euro-Atlanti institutions primarily in the field of security. It can be argued since the very beginning, some of the post-Soviet states showed great interest to be a member of the NATO alliance such as Moldova, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan (before 2005) declared themselves NATO's allies – while some (Georgia, Ukraine) set their medium or long-term goals to join the alliance in the future. Most of the other States, including Russia, weren't interested in integration into NATO due to the ideaological differences, however, they realized the necessity of cooperation and signed an agreement for Peace (PFP) Program.[2]

The EU initiated the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), the main goal of EU was to enhance Political and economic integerations with its Southern and Eastern neighbors. One part of this policy was the Eastern

[1] Euro-Atlantic region refers to the countries in North America, Europe, and Asian countries on the European periphery.

[2] Lazarević Dušica, "NATO Enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia: Old Wine in New Bottles?" *Connections 9, no. 1*, (2009): 29–66. Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/26326193

Partnership designed within ENP frameworks to cooperate with six Eastern neighbors, post-Soviet countries. In 2013 two states of the Post-Soviet region (Armenia and Ukraine) were preparing to sign Association Agreement with the EU deepening their relations with this organization.[3]

On the other hand, the institutions created in the Post-Soviet space turned fragile from regional integrity, conflict-management, and further development. The mere presence of diverse regional institutions, which have different foreign-policy orientations, witnesses the ineffectiveness of institutions we define as an institutional vacuum. The term institutional vacuum is metaphoric, and it is used to describe the absence or the weakness of regulatory institutions in a wide range of areas. Here is, as mentioned above, refers to the fault of the international institutions in the post-Soviet region and their inability to achieve the tasks they were meant to achieve, such as political, economic, and military cooperation, conflict management, and regional integrity.

The relations in the Post-Soviet region were based on bilateral regulations rather than multilateralism due to factors such as institutional ineffectiveness and power distribution in the region in favor of Russia. And also geographical (Russia as geographically center) and historical factors. Economically and politically, the members of nowadays Eurasian Union do not have close ties with each other, except with Russia. Also, from the perspective of Russia, bilateral regulation has turned to be more productive and less costly, considering the price of creation and maintenance of institutions and domestic resistance of regional countries to the formation of any institution in the region with robust institutional frameworks and strictly binding regulations. Moreover, significantly Russia could not expand the model of quasi-alliance on the regional states considering the low rate of security concerns in most regional countries and the availability of foreign-policy options.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the relations between the states of the Post-Soviet region had characterized by bilateral regulations rather than multilateralism. Then, the central puzzle is how to explain the emerging multilateralism in economic cooperation considering bilateralism of relations between the states of the Post-Soviet region? Is it designed to provide regional states with a more significant role on the international stage, creating a standard economic zone or a response to institutional pressure from outside, or a historically path-dependent process considering the past relations between member states of this organization?

The recent events in the region proved that bilateral regulations are not effective anymore. First, in some cases, bilateral regulations reached the direct use of force and the emergence of a political and diplomatic crisis in the region (Russian-Georgian war of 2008 and the Ukrainian crisis). One

[3] Laurence Peter, *Armenia rift over trade deal fuels EU-Russia tension*, (2013). Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23975951 [Accessed January 17, 2019].

might argue that bilateral relations and regulations sometimes are dominated by Russia to sphere of influence in bordering countries. After the 2008 Georgian war, Then President of Russia Dimitry Medvedev said that Russia's neighboring regions are Russia's spheres of "privileged interests" and it has the obligation t to defend Russian citizens residing abroad.[4] Second, Extra-regional institutions (NATO, EU) have turned to be effective in their engagement in the region and involvement of the regional states in their institutionalization process.

These two factors cause instability in the region in the face of political, diplomatic, and economic cresses and tensions and undermine the geopolitical integrity of the region. The role of Regions' geo-political complexity cannot be ignored, on one side Euro-Atlantic community, and Russia on the other pursue to exert their influence and outline their sphere of interest.[5]

From this perspective, Eurasian Economic Union is designed to overcome institutional vacuum in the Post-Soviet Region, provide stability and durability of relations, reduce institutional manoeuvrability of the regional states, and maintain geopolitical integrity of the region. Institutional vacuum here refers not to the absence of significant institutions regulating the relations between regional states but rather to the perspective of their ineffectiveness to maintain the region's geopolitical integrity and prevent or devaluate any cause of conflict and instability resulting from the disruption of geopolitical integrity.

According to Alexander George and Andrew Bennett "the method of process-tracing, which tries to creat the links among possible causes and expected outcomes. In the method of process-tracing, the researcher survey histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesizes or implies in a case is in fact evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variables in that case."[6]

To understand the region's political reality and theoretical implications for its latest trends, we will first discuss the bilateralism of relations in the

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[4] Berls Robert E, Jr.. *Strengthening Russia's Influence in International Affairs, Part II: Russia and Its Neighbors: A Sphere of Influence or a Declining Relationship?* (2021 July 13). Available at https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/strengthening-russias-influence-in-international-affairs-part-iirussia-and-its-neighbors-a-sphere-of-influence-or-a-declining-relationship [Accessed on October 29, 2021].

[5] Teodor Lucian Moga and Denis Alexeev, "Post-Soviet States Between Russia and the EU: Reviving Geopolitical Competition? A Dual Perspective." *Connections* (Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, 13 (1) 2013), 41-52. Availble at https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26326349

[6] Alexander L. George. "Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences." P53.

region and its significance for the type of regulations (within institutional frameworks or not) in this region. Then, we will discuss the notion of institutional vacuum in the Post-Soviet region from the perspective of regional institutions' ability (or disability) to create robust institutional frameworks of cooperation and maintain the region's geopolitical integrity. Thus, specifying the factors under which the Eurasian Economic Union is created.

The authors will try to explain how and to what extent these factors precondition the nature of the new organization and its goals? The authors have adapted qualitative reseatch method of process tracing.[7] By using this method, attapmt has been made to establish link between possible causes and perceived outcomes. The source of data to prove the main argument will come from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include government official documents including articles from international security journals, and speeches. Secondary materials include already existing published work by academicians, news, and relevant electronic sources.

## Bilateralism of Relations (Regulations)

The regulations of regional processes have been taken place bilaterally rather than on the multilateral base. Economically and politically, the members of nowadays Eurasian Union do not have close relationships or relations comparable with Russia's. ***Bilateral relations combined with other factors*** led to the ***bilateralism of regulations*** among regional states and weaknesses of regional institutions as frameworks for regional political discourse and decision-making centres. One might say that the Russia's strong bilateral relations could be understood in the context of its georgraphical connectivity with most of the post soviet states. Hence, bilateralism of relations is rooted in the geographical conditions in the region, historical path, and power-distribution bias in favor of one primary state (Russia). It would be better to look at the relations between member states of the newly created organization from this perspective and provide some data to make out some standard features and regularities of relations within the region and the specific features that would clarify our arguments about the regulative process in the region.

It can be argued that Russia and Belarus historically, culturally, and politically have enjoyed close relations. After the disintergeration of the Soviet Union, Russia maintained close ties with Belarus keeping in view that Belarus could be a core unit in maintaining its influence in its "near abroad." In February 1995, President Yeltsin after signing the Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighborliness, and Cooperation with Belarus, stressed that "the two

[7] Alexander L. George, "*Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*," P69.

nations [had] shared a common historical experience over many centuries"[8] that, he declared, had "created the basis for signing the treaty and other documents on deeper integration of our two countries. Among all CIS countries, Belarus has greater rights to a relationship due to its geographical location, its contacts with Russia, our friendship, and the progress of its reforms."[9]

On April 2nd, 1996, a formal integration process was launched through the formation of the Commonwealth of Russia and Belarus. Later on, the Commonwealth beame the Union of Belarus and Russia. On December 25th, 1998, after a long stagnation in the relations, the presidents of Belarus and Russia signed an agreement on the Further Unification of Russia and Belarus.[10] The height of integration was an formation of a Union State between Russia and Belarus on December 8th, 1999. Russian aspirations to form a union – as Yeltsin described it, *"simply unite and there will be a Belo-Russ"*.[11]

Under the declaration, the Union of Belarus and Russia has allowed the latter to regain control over the western part of its former Soviet border to benefit economically and politically. However, it was an example of the failure of multilateral platforms in the region and an alternative to institutional cooperation on a large scale. A dysfunctional CIS as an integration platform encouraged Russia to look for other mechanisms that would enable it to prevent centrifugal tendencies in the post-Soviet space. furthermore, such mechanisms expounded on the bilateral base of relations, which was typical for other states.

Belarus and Russia also have high-level economic relations. According to The Foreign Ministry of Belarus, a legal framework of bilateral cooperation between Belarus and Russia consist of more than 200 treaties, agreements, and protocols. Normally, the documents serve to the further expansion of multidirectional and mutual relations between the two countries. We can argue that ore than 80% of such contracts are economy-related: Belarusian supplies to the Russian regions expanded the distribution network of Belarusian businesses, stronger industrial partnership, and set-up of assembly facilities.[12]

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[8] Itar-Tass, "Yeltsin on Protecting CIS Border," in *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis*, ed. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paige Sullivan (New York: Armonk, 1997), 311.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Richard Sakwa and Mark Webber, "The Commonwealth of Independent States, 1991-1998: Stagnation and Survival." *Europe-Asia Studies* 51 (3) (Taylor & Francis, 1999), 379-415. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/153688

[11] Vesti newscast, "Yeltsin Looking Forward to „Belo-Rus," in *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysi*s, ed. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paige Sulliva,n (New York: Armonk, 1997), 314.

[12] MFA of Belarus, Belarus, and Russia's regions. Available at: http://mfa.gov.by/en/courtiers/russia_regions/c78d05de8240c03a.html [Accessed on January 7th, 2019].

Over the previous decade, mutual trade between the two countries has increased more than fourfold, reaching $39.7 billion in 2013. In 2013 Russia accounted for 49.5% of the Belarusian foreign trade. Exports increased by 3.2% as compared with 2012 and reached $16.8 bn.
In 2014 the positive trend of development of trade and economic relations between Belarus and Russia was sustained. As of January-September 2014, the mutual trade amounted to $ 28.3 billion, with exports to Russia reaching $ 11.9 billion and imports from Russia — $ 16.5 billion. Russia accounts for 48.7% of the Belarusian foreign trade. Belarus is one of Russia's six major trading partners.[13]
Hence, these two countries have close economic and political relations, cultural cohesion, which have a historical dimension. The relations between Kazakhstan and Russia also have a firm base. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many treaties and agreements have been signed to elaborate bilateral cooperation, including the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance of May 25th, 1992, declaration of eternal friendship and alliance for the 21st century, from July 6th, 1998. According to Article 5 of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, parties will provide each other necessary assistance, including military, in case of an act of aggression against one of the parties or both.[14] These create a firm bilateral framework for cooperation, consistency, and joint pursuit of interests in bilateral and multilateral stages of political action.
Kazakhstan and Russia are founding members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Kazakhstan is one of the critical states and a partner of Russian in institutionalization processes in the region. Russia accounts for 18.44% of Kazakhstan's commodity circulation (first trade partner). During the last 23 years the exports of Russia to Kazakhstan have increased at an annualized rate of 7.96%, from $2.39B in 1996 to $13.9B in 2019.[15]

The next member of the Eurasian Union, Armenia, also has close bilateral relations with Russia. These countries are strategic allies. According to the treaty of friendship, collaboration and mutual aid of August 29th 1997, both states will *jointly take all available measures to remove threats to the peace, break of the order or counter acts of aggression against them by any state or group of states will provide each other with assistance, including military, in the exercise of the right to collective self-defense*

[13] *Russia and Union State*. Available at: http://mfa.gov.by/en/courtiers/russia/ [Accessed on January 7th, 2019].
[14] Dogovor o druzhbe, sotrudnichestve i vzaimnoj pomoshhi mezhdu Rossijskoj Federaciej i Respublikoj Kazahstan. Available at:http://mid.ru/bdomp/spd_md.nsf/0/89DF9AD66A237FDDC3257DB900477936 [Accessed on January 9th, 2019].
[15] *OEC World data*, https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/rus/partner/kaz

*following Article 51 of the UN Charter"*[16]. Russia accounts for 19.6% of Armenian export and 24.8% of Armenian imports (first trade partner). During the last 23 years the exports of Russia to Armenia have increased at an annualized rate of 14.7%, from $61M in 1996 to $1.44B in 2019.[17]

The establishment of bilateral relations between the members of the Eurasian Union before creating the organization has allowed solving some strategic issues. First of all, regulations on the bilateral base have created a complex net of relations without imposing them into a multilateral framework in which consistency of action would be much more complicated, considering divergent interests of possible participants. Because of this, the decision-making is more mobile, bypassing possible scenarios of complex regulations by bringing together different interests of potential players.

Second, it has prevented the formation of balance-groupings within multilateral frameworks of cooperation, trying to combine the efforts of other participants to balance the influence of Russia in the region. Third, the regulation on the bilateral base has turned to be more practical considering the domestic resistance of regional states to the creation of any institution with strict rules and containments on state sovereignty, as the Post-Soviet states are sensitive to the issues of sovereignty and state independence. Fourth, although there are many multilateral frameworks of cooperation, the cost of creation and maintenance of institutions has exceeded the benefits of doing so, considering the availability of bilateral options.

However, the existing bilateralism has been formed between Russia and other participants, with Russia connecting them. The absence of high-developed bilateral relations within states in the Post-Soviet region has preconditioned the success of multilateral institutions (failure). For example, as we mentioned above, Russia is the number one trade partner and core political and military partner in the regional and international stages for all three member-states. However, when looking at the economic relations between these three countries, it would clarify the issue of multilateralism in the region. For example, according to data of 2013 [18], Belarus is Kazakhstan's 24th trader partner only, and Kazakhstan is Belarus' 10th trade partner according to data of 2013.[19]

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[16] Dogovor o druzhbe, sotrudnichestve i vzaimnoj pomoshhi mezhdu Rossijskoj Federaciej i Respublikoj Armenija (podpisano v Moskve 29.08.97) Available at: http://www.lawrussia.ru/texts/legal_555/doc555a808x659.htm[Accessed on January 9th , 2019].

[17] *OEC World data*, https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/rus/partner/arm

[18] Kursiv, *Top 30 krupnejshih torgovyh partnerov Kazahstana*, (2015) Available at http://www.kursiv.kz/news/details/top_ratings/Top-30-krupnejshih-torgovyh-partnerov-Kazahstana/[Accessed on January 11th, 2019].

[19] Itogi vneshnej torgovli Respubliki Belarus' za janvar'-mart 2013 Available at: http://gtk.gov.by/ru/stats/itogi_vnesh_torgovli2013/mart13 [Accessed on January 11th, 2019].

The intention of Armenia to enter into the Eurasian Union met resistance by Kazakhstan and sharp disagreement. Even considering the existence of many multilateral institutional frameworks of cooperation and policy coordination, these states very often show each other disloyalty, trying to gain benefits and achieve goals alone, sometimes playing against the interests of each other. It stems from the weakness of institutional frameworks, and the weakness is strictly connected to the factor of cheating among regional states.

So, the data and political practice show the existence of bilateral relations between the regional states from one side, and between Russia, from another side. However, bilateral ties between regional countries, except that of Russia, are low considering the low level of economic relations, centrifugal tendencies and the problem of providing political alignment in regional and international affairs. The absence of high-level multilateral and even bilateral relations among regional states has preconditioned the faith of multilateral institutions in the region, leading to their weakness, which we would describe as an institutional vacuum.

## Institutional Vacuum

The Post-Soviet region presents an exciting picture from the perspective of institutional developments. This region is a vital link between the East and the West. It can be argued that the development ofpowerful economic, military and political blocs here would be very beneficial. However, the integration processes are associated with several serious challenges caused by strategic interests of different states.

Bilateralism of relations, combined with regional conflicts of ethnic and political characters, has led regional states to bypass existing institutional frameworks of cooperation, pursuing their interests unilaterally or by aligning with extra-regional forces. Despite the presence of diverse regional institutions and mechanisms for joint policy coordination(CIS, CISFTA, CSTO), we argue that there is an institutional vacuum in the region due to present ineffectiveness from the perspective of their inefficiency provide regional integrity. So, institutional vacuum here refers not to the absence of regional institutional framework, rather than to their ineffectiveness. We would not observe extra-regional institutions that now are engaged in the region, and institutional vacuum merely refers to the institutional mechanisms of providing regional integrity.

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was the first major and almost all-inclusive organization that was established in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In its foundation document, [20] the organization's main goals were to coordinate foreign policy and cooperation to form and develop a common economic space, common markets, and coordinate customs policy.

[20] Soglashenija o sozdanii Sodruzhestva Nezavisimyh Gosudarstv. Available at http://cis.minsk.by/page.php?id=176 [Accessed on January 12th, 2019].

The CIS based on the continuation of former-Soviet interdependence between states and the adaptation of the mechanisms regulating their relations to the new situation emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In terms of forming the organization, the role of leader states (Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus) as core actors in the organization and the region was enormous. However, after the collapse of the Union emerged many problems that conditioned the future of the organization.

First, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many ethnic and political conflicts broke up (conflicts in Abkhazia, Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, North Ossetia, South Ossetia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Chechnya, disagreements between Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan), which, in some cases, led to open confrontations and instabilities in the region.

Second, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the regional states adopted different vectors of foreign orientation, establishing partner relationships with the EU, NATO, the US, which also weakened the perceptions of the expected future.

Third, the creation of any organization intended to be all-inclusive was perceived emotionally by the newly independent states, viewing those kinds of attempts as a threat to their independence and sovereignty (the mere name of the organization had negative connotations-Commonwealth of ***Independent*** States).

The CIS is not a supranational organization. It was designed to regulate the relations between the regional states and coordinate their actions based on non-binding regulations. However, the CIS as a consultative organ did not work due to the passivity of the organization in the light of many regional conflicts and disagreements. This organization does not play any serious role in regional processes, and it seems that member-states are late to declare that the organization does not exist.

Another major organization, created in the Post-Soviet region, is the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian and Tajikistan. Based on the Collective Security Treaty of 1992, the organization came into existence in 2002 as a military alliance of member states. According to Article 5 of the CSTO Charter, "the Member States shall take joint measures to achieve the purposes of the organization to form thereunder the efficient system of collective security providing collective protection in case of menace to safety, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty and exercise of the right to mutual defense, including creation of coalition (collective) forces of the organization, regional (united) groups of armies (forces), peacekeeping forces, unified systems and the bodies governing them, military infrastructure[21].

[21] Organizacija Dogovora o kollektivnoj bezopasnosti. Osnovopolagajushhie dokumenty. Available at: http://www.odkb-csto.org/documents/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=1896 [Accessed on January 13th, 2019].

In 2009, an agreement on creating a joint contingent of military forces was signed between member states to protect them from aggressions, participate in efforts to combat international terrorism, strengthen troops covering the state border protection, and public and military installations of the parties and so on[22]. This step is characterized as the militarization of CSTO from a primarily political organization to a more cohesive militarized security alliance[23].

However, now, CSTO is a military organization in minimal terms. Despite many conflicts in the region, it never proved its effectiveness as a military alliance. Compared to other military alliance like NATO, the military capabilities are minimal and have much more symbolic significance than military power capable of solving real military issues and guaranteeing security and stability in the region. After its creation, it has turned to be a stage of political coordination rather than a full-right military organization capable of providing the security of its members. In recent years CSTO has faced several challenges and failed to demonstrate its constructive role, forexample the organization essentially paid little to no attention the Norgrno Karabkh conflict that created serious resentments among the Armenian public which did not accepted CSTO's standing that war was taking place in a territory which is officially recognized as Azerbaijan's territory.[24] The argument proved unconvincing to Armenian public since they were of the view that the Azerbaijan's military offense was taking place in Armenian territory.

Despite its limited military capabilities, the CSTO was the first organization that helped to turn the formed bilateral relations into a comprehensive system of policy coordination and cooperation. All the member states of the organization have agreements with Russia in military fields of coopertion, and, in this sense, CSTO seemed to reestablish those relations, which may have been more effective and continue to be active than new ties within a single organization. The creation of the new

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[22] See Soglashenie o Kollektivnyh silah operativnogo reagirovanija Organizacii Dogovora o kollektivnoj bezopasnosti Available at: http://www.conventions.ru/view_base.php?id=1376 [Accessed on January 13th, 2019].

[23] See "Russian-led CSTO Grouping Adds Military Dimension," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, (04 February 2009), Available at http://www.rferl.org/Content/Rapid_Reaction_Force_Adds_Military_Dimension_To_CSTO/1379324.html [Accessed on January 13th, 2019]. IIya Kramnik, "CSTO – *Joining Forces in a Crisis*," (RIA Novosti, 02 May 2009), Available at: http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20090205/119991573 [Accessed on January 13th, 2019]. "Russia creates own version of NATO in Central Asia to be prepared for big war," *Pravda*, (29 May 2009). Available at: http://dprogram. net/2009/05/29/msm-russia-creates-its-own-version-of-nato-in-central-asia-to-be-prepared-for-big-war/ [Accessed on January 13th , 2019].

[24] Kirill Krivosheev, *Carnegei Moscow Center. Does the Collective Security Treaty Organization Have a Future?* (July 8, 2021). Available at: https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/84923

organization also influenced the process of further implementation of institutionalization in the region, creating more incentives for further cooperation in other fields. The President of Armenia Serj Sargsyan noted that "being in the same system of military security, it is impossible and ineffective to be isolated from adequate geo-economics space".[25] So, the creation of CSTO made more incentives for the states of the region to expand the process of institutionalization, but itself, it remains limited in terms of both military and institutional cooperation.

The desire of some regional states to form institutional structures without the participation of Russia and with more coherent interests brought regional countries to create some sub-regional organizations like GUAM and Baltic Assembly. GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development was formed after 1997 by four post-Soviet states: Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova.[26] One of the crucial goals of creating the organization was to form an organization alternative to the Russian led CIS and expressed centrifugal tendencies of the sub-regional states. Second, the member states declared their readiness to promote democratic values and procedures within their countries and in the region with the cooperation with international organizations and especially the European structures. [27] However, the fully authoritarian character of one of the states (Azerbaijan) makes the democratic goals of the organization very suspicious. After its creation, GUAM was passive until 2005 and connected to the new processes in the sub-region, especially the Orange revolution in Ukraine. The last events in the sub-region, including the member states of GUAM, especially the Georgian-Russian war of 2008 and instability in the recent years in Ukraine and the passivity of the organization in such kind of activities puts under suspicion the cohesion of the member states and the role of the organization as a mechanism of policy coordination and stage for further development.

Baltic Assembly (BA) is a framework of cooperation on the parliamentary level between the Baltic republics: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to form a common position on international and domestic issues setting a platform of policy coordination. During its existence, the organization has helped to establish a collective identity of the Baltic republics, to form joint positions on many issues and to pursue shared interests, especially in their way to EU membership. After the acceptation of

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[25] Joint Statement on the results of the visit of the President of the Republic of Armenia to the Russian Federation. (Moscow, September 3, 2013). Available at: http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2013/09/03/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-and-President-Vladimir-Putin-joint-statement/ [Accessed on January 15th, 2019].

[26] Official website of GUAM organization, available at: https://guam-organization.org/en/about-the-organization-for-democracy-and-economic-development-guam/

[27] Ibid.

these countries into the European Union, the organization seems to have lost its significance as a mechanism of policy coordination and cooperation.

Bilateralism of relations combined with the presence of regional conflicts of ethnic and political characters have led regional states to bypass existing institutional frameworks of cooperation to pursue their interests unilaterally or by alignment with extra-regional forces. Newly established institutions turned to be fragile from the perspective of conflict management, policy coordination, and trust-building between states that were a common political unit within the Soviet Union. The ineffectiveness of new institutions has unleashed institutional uncertainty and expansion of extra-regional organizations in the region trying to involve regional states in their frameworks. The created institutional vacuum has heightened the transaction costs between the regional states, raised the problem of cheating between regional states and fostered conflicts in the region, causing regional instability.

## Eurasian Union: Overcoming Institutional Vacuum

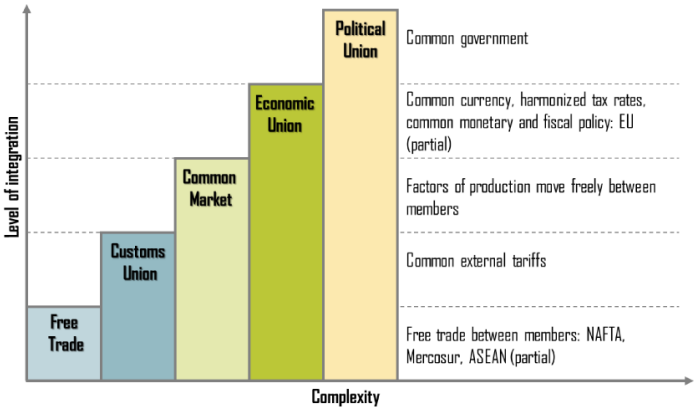
Eurasian integration started after the collapse of the Soviet Union as one vector of further cooperation and institution building in the region, considering high economic interdependence between regional states and the possibilities of new joint development. The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, suggested creating a trading bloc between Post-Soviet countries in the early 1990s. However, in the 1990s and 2000s, the integration process was slow, and the idea of the Post-Soviet region as a common economic area remained merely more an idea than an actual project.

The first natural step in this direction was the creation of the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, which came into existence on January 1st, 2010. In the Joint Statement of the heads of member states, the formation of the Customs Union provides for the establishment of a single customs territory, within which are not applicable customs duties and economic restrictions, except for particular protective, countervailing anti-dumping measures. A customs union applies a unified customs tariff and other standard rules regulating trade with third countries[28]. According to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade of 1994, a custom territory means "any territory concerning which separate tariffs or other regulations of commerce are maintained for a substantial part of the trade of such territory with other territories"[29].

[28] Tamozhenniy Soyuz: dogovor o sozdanii. Available at: http://www.sovet-ts.ru/tamozhenniy_soyuz/dogovor_o_sozdanii/ [Accessed on January 15th, 2019].

[29] *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994*, ("GATT 1994"). http://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/06-gatt_e.htm

TABLE 1. Levels of economic organization[30]




It could be presumed that the member states of a customs union cannot have that kind of relations with other custom unions or that kind of organization. It means that those states in the Post-Soviet region that want to be a part of the Eurasian Customs Union cannot deepen their economic relations within institutional frameworks with other second and higher-level economic level organizations, including EU. So, this meant the emergence of the first organization in the Post-Soviet region with such kind of high-level binding regulations. In 2014 Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia signed another treaty on creating the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which came into existence on January 1st, 2015. After January 1st, Armenia also joined the Eurasian Union, and Kirgizstan signed a treaty to join the Union. An economic union is a higher level of organization, implies more binding institutional regulations, and is the late stage of forming a political union (Table 1).

The creation of both the Customs Union and the emergence of EEU were the first organizations in the region with a high level of binding regulations. The strength of the customs union as a form of institutional integration is the imposition of standard external tariffs for the non-member states. It means that the member states cannot engage in any economic integration with non-member states, be it free trade organization, custom union, or common market. It seemed to direct against European integration of the post-Soviet states. With the creation of the EEU afterwards, which as an economic union implies standard economic policy and common external trade policy, the perspective of European integration was eventually doomed.

A vivid example is Armenia, which rejected to sign the European Association Agreement on the grounds of EU and EEU integration incompatibility. Thus, the creation of EEU solved the problems that the

[30] Levels of economic organization. Available at: https://people.hofstra.edu/geotrans/eng/ch5en/conc5en/economicintegration.html [Accessed on January 15th, 2019].

previous organizations in the post-Soviet region had not been able to answer. One such issue is the expansion of Western institutions into the post-Soviet region. Moreover, the other one is the regional integration which had failed previously due to the declarative nature of the previous institutions. The newly created EEU regulations are binding, and the regional states had to comply with these rules once becoming a member of the organization. These robust institutional frameworks give an opportunity to solve the problem of cheating between regional states, manage the existing interdependence between regional states, and provide stability in the region.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, as we noted, the region was characterized by bilateral regulations and little significance of institutional frameworks. The last significant conflicts in the region and the rise of cost to govern without institutions brought regional states to create new institutional structures to overcome existing institutional vacuum and make regulations in the region more stable by maintaining the geopolitical integrity of the region.

## Conclusion

The institutions created in the Post-Soviet space turned fragile from the perspective of regional integrity, conflict management, and further development. The mere presence of diverse regional institutions witnesses the inefficiency of those institutions referred to as an institutional vacuum. Considering the institutional incompetence and power distribution in the region in favor of Russia and geographical (Russia as geographically center) and historical relations between these states, the relationships in the Post-Soviet region have been characterized by bilateral regulations rather than multilateralism.

The recent events in the region proved that bilateral regulations are not sufficient anymore. First, in some cases, bilateral regulations reached the direct use of force and the emergence of a political and diplomatic crisis in the region (Russian-Georgian war of 2008 and the Ukrainian crisis). Second, extra-regional institutions (NATO, EU) have turned to be effective in their engagement in the region and involvement of the regional states in their institutionalization process. These two factors cause instability in the region in the face of political, diplomatic, and economic crises and tensions and undermine the geopolitical integrity of the region. From this perspective, Eurasian Economic Union is designed to overcome the institutional vacuum in the Post-Soviet Region to reduce the institutional manoeuvrability of the regional states and maintain the region's geopolitical integrity, providing peace and stability in the region.

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# DERADICALIZATION IN CENTRAL ASIA: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

**Summar Iqbal Babar[*] & Filza Ahmed Rizvi[Ψ]**

## Abstract

*The Central Asian region is currently facing a grave challenge of repatriation of IS-fighters which has posed a serious threat to its socio-economic and political structures. The repatriates also include women and children who may need to be assessed to determine whether they have been radicalized. As a response to these returnees, Central Asian States have structured a CVE which focuses on changing the narrative through religious education, rehabilitation, reintegration, and promoting civil society. This study investigates CVE measures in Central Asia to prevent recruitment to terrorist organizations, reduce the number of fighters from this region and further contain the threat of radicalization caused by the influx of repatriates returning from Syria and Iraq. This study is divided into three parts. The first part outlines the threats posed by the return of foreign fighters; the second part explains the various theoretical models to understand process of radicalization and practices for deradicalization and the last part evaluates different CVE measures in Central Asia to eradicate further radicalization and extremism.*

**Keywords:** Deradicalization, Repatriates, CVE, Foreign Fighters

## Introduction

Central Asia is a region with a unique combination of Post-Soviet and Islamic elements and has dealt with radicalization up-close with the

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emergence of radicalizations such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan[1] (IMU) and over 4000 foreign fighters exported from this region[2]. Central Asian states have also experienced authoritarian regimes which continue to contribute to political stability in the region[3]. The Hizb ut-Tahrir; founded in Jerusalem in 1953, has also been active in the region despite being banned[4]. The Hizb ut-Tahrir is not considered to be a terrorist organization[5]. Their ideology focuses on the formation of an Islamic Caliphate which although does not encourage violence to achieve their objectives but ultimately promotes Jihad[6]. It has been argued that although this particular organization is non-violent in nature, it acts as a conveyor belt[7] by pushing its members to seek far more radical organizations. It provides easy access for radical organizations to target and persuade vulnerable individuals into becoming recruits[8]. On November 4, 2021, the leader and members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir was detained in Kyrgyzstan[9]. The argument made in this case is that due to the strict measures taken against a non-violent organization in Central Asia, it may lead to more cases of radicalization[10]. Central Asian states have

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practiced strict laws against Islam as a response to the increase in recruitment to the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), IMU and IS[11]. This is especially seen in the case of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In Uzbekistan, during Islam Karimov's regime, religious freedom was limited[12]. This has also been the case in Tajikistan where there have been prohibitions on headscarves/hijabs and beards and the ban placed on minors from attending prayers in mosques[13]. The moderate Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) was dissolved and listed as a terrorist organization in 2015[14]. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have also been classified as states prohibiting religious freedom by the US Department of State[15]. The volatile political unrest has also made Central Asia vulnerable to radicalization. Kyrgyzstan witnessed two revolutions i.e., the Tulip Revolution in 2005 which saw the overthrowing of the President, Askar Akayev in 2005 and in 2010; Kyrgyzstan saw the removal of the President who succeeded Akayev, Kurmanbek Bakiyev.[16]

The Ferghana Valley which shares borders in the East of Uzbekistan, the South of Kyrgyzstan and the North of Tajikistan has already been a problematic region where the IMU has been active.[17] Due to Central Asia's geo-political proximity to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the IMU's active

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role and involvement in these two states,[18] it helps to explain why Central Asia has been linked with the exporting of foreign fighters. There have been fewer cases of terrorist attacks within Central Asia[19] compared to the terrorist attacks which took place in other parts of the world but were linked to Central Asia. The Terrorist Attacks which gained notoriety associated to Central Asia were the "Boston Marathon Bombings "in 2013, as the perpetrators were Kyrgyz born citizens[20]. In 2017, an attack was carried out in Stockholm, Sweden by an Uzbek Citizen[21]. Later that year, the "St. Petersburg Metro" bombing took place, which was also carried out by an ethnic Uzbek from Kyrgyzstan[22]. Apart from attacks in Europe and the US, Central Asia has also exported terrorists to the Middle East[23].

Since the demise of IS in 2019[24], Central Asia has seen an influx of foreign fighters returning home which also includes an alarming number of women and children[25]. Central Asia had been urged to accept the repatriates as the U.S President Donald Trump directed states with the highest number of repatriates to do so which also included European states[26]. This has led to a

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new crisis especially with the pandemic and the large number of refugees still stranded in Syria and Iraq[27]. The Central Asian Republics have accepted repatriates with Kazakhstan repatriating 600 individuals including women and children in April 2020, under Operation Zhusan, specifically designed for this purpose[28]. Uzbekistan repatriated 148 women and children in 2019[29]. Tajikistan has been working to repatriate women and children[30]. As of 2019, Kyrgyzstan has also made plans to identify Kyrgyz citizens stranded in Syria and Iraq and repatriate them[31].

For this purpose, deradicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration need to be necessary to contain and intercept the problem. Radicalized repatriates pose a threat of further radicalizing others if they are not dealt with immediately and accordingly.

## Process of Radicalization

Fathali M. Moghaddam, in his work Staircase to Terrorism – a psychological perspective on the radicalization process, explains how there are six metaphorical staircase steps an individual goes through which eventually lead to acts of violence[32]. Moghaddam stressed the importance of

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contextualized democracy[33] which essentially implies that for democracy to be successful in Muslim states, the norms and values of society to create a form of democracy which better suits a Muslim state as the western version cannot be apply to these states. When there is lack of contextualized democracy it may lead to displacement of aggression[34]. Displacement of aggression in relation with contextualized democracy takes place when an individual may feel that their voice and opinion is not heard and this may cause this individual to find alternative sources to release this pent-up aggression, which may include further radicalization and moving upwards on the staircase.

Moghaddam explained the importance of anti-west sentiments that exist in Muslim states[35]. These anti-west sentiments contribute to the "Us vs Them" style of thinking which further pushes an individual towards radicalization[36]. This is especially evident in the case of Central Asian states have had a rocky relationship with democracy with the existence of authoritarian regimes such as that of Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan[37] and Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan[38]. Due to these authoritative and rigid governments, the citizens may feel that their voices are irrelevant and not acknowledged which may lead to displacement of aggression. Central Asian States have also had a history of suppressing the right to practice religion freely which may lead to individuals perceiving it as a threat to their identity causing cognitive dissonance. The process of radicalization is a slow process with various ideological and psychological factors involved making it crucial for us to understand the mechanisms to reach a better understanding of the concept of deradicalization.

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## Deradicalization

"CVE or PVE refers to the "soft" side of counterterrorism strategies that tackle the drivers which lead people to engage in politically or ideologically motivated violence"[39]. By taking up soft approaches, the idea is to prevent radicalization or intercept the process of radicalization before it reaches to the point where violence occurs. CVE or PVE is geared towards home-grown terrorism[40] as it had been on the rise in the United States of America shortly after the War on Terror in 2001 followed by the September 11th Attacks[41], and still continues to pose a threat globally[42]. Instead of harsh methods of Counterterrorism however, strategies were devised geared towards countering the ideology preached by Terrorism for example, the infamous lectures of Anwar Al-Awlaki as his lectures preached an "Us vs Them" style of thinking coupled with anti-west sentiments drawing individuals towards terrorism[43]. CVE aims to deter individuals from radicalization that may cause violence and hence operates on a micro level[44]. For this purpose, radicalization is defined as the process of developing extreme ideology and beliefs[45] and CVE aims to prevent radicalization from moving towards violence. CVE comes in direct competition with the ideas of jihadist ideology and hence why the phrase Battle of Ideas[46] has been used.

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Deradicalization is a CVE measure which seeks to reverse radicalization[47]. The premises required for deradicalization to take place include a controlled environment which may involve governmental and non-governmental entities[48]. Lindsay Clutterbuck explains how the term "deradicalization" should only be attributed to efforts to prevent violence and reintegrate individuals in a post-surrender, post-detention and post-conviction setting[49]. Any efforts to prevent radicalization before this fall into the categories of anti-radicalization and counter-radicalization[50]. Deradicalization is complex it aims to adjust an individual's ideology and addresses an individual's frame of mind, hence it aims to bring out about a cognitive shift[51]. When compared with disengagement, which is merely a behavioral shift as explained by John Horgan, who states that disengagement only removes an individual from a situation where they can commit acts of violence[52]. This may take place in the event of imprisonment or in the removal of an individual from a terrorist organization. Disengagement is, however, linked with deradicalization as for the latter to take place the former also needs to occur.

Deradicalization and the approaches adopted to achieve differ in the West and Muslim States. In Muslim States such as Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, radicalized individuals are tackled with from a theological angle and are engaged in debates aimed at making an individual realize that their interpretation of Islam is inaccurate[53]. In the United Kingdom, there is a

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[47] Lindsay Clutterbuck, "Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism: A Perspective on the Challenges and Benefits" *Middle East Institute* (June 2015) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/Clutterbuck.pdf

[48]Clutterbuck, "Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism: A Perspective on the Challenges and Benefits"

[49]Clutterbuck, "Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism: A Perspective on the Challenges and Benefits"

[50]Clutterbuck, "Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism: A Perspective on the Challenges and Benefits"

[51]John Horgan, "Deradicalization or Disengagement?", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 4, (February 2008): 3-8. Accessed September 21, 2020. http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/32/65 https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30294.pdf

[52]Horgan, "Deradicalization or Disengagement?"

[53] Angel Rabasa, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Jeremy Ghez and Christopher Boucek, "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists" Santa Monica, CA: *RAND Corporation* (2010) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG1053.pdf

focus on the societal role of radicalized individuals[54]. Operation Constrain in the UK aimed to provide radicalized individuals with council houses, employment, psychological assistance and education[55]. The UK has a Counter Terrorism Strategy; PREVENT which aims to prevent individuals from turning towards or supporting terrorism[56]. It is difficult to assess the success and the long-term effects of CVE measures such as deradicalization.[57]

In the literature regarding deradicalization, an emphasis has been placed on cognitive openings which refers to an individual's ability and willingness to transform their current mental state and this can take place due to an internal or external conflict of interests[58]. The importance of cognitive openings implies that there needs to be a willingness to change. Koehler presented 7 Types of Deradicalization Models taken up by both Western States and Muslim States, but ultimately came to the conclusion that there is no right method for deradicalization[59]. Each state has its own unique political culture and contributing factors which are taken into account when designing a deradicalization program, however, the success of deradicalization may be calculated by evaluating the cases of recidivism.[60]

For this purpose, Horgan and Braddock used Multi-Attribute Utility Technology (MAUT) or Multi-Attribute Evaluation (ME) to assist the designing of deradicalization[61]. In order to understand MAUT in Central

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[54] Antonia Ward, "To Ensure Deradicalisation Programmes Are Effective, Better Evaluation Practices Must First Be Implemented" *The Rand Blog* (March 4, 2019) Accessed September 27, 2020. https://www.rand.org/blog/2019/03/to-ensure-deradicalisation-programmes-are-effective.html

[55] Lizzie Dearden, "Home Office plan to give jihadis council houses and support part of 'overdue' strategy to combat terrorism" *Independent* (October 31, 2017) Accessed September 27, 2020. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/home-office-jihadis-council-houses-isis-support-fight-terrorism-strategy-operation-constrain-returning-government-a8030321.html

[56]Ward, "To Ensure Deradicalisation Programmes Are Effective, Better Evaluation Practices Must First Be Implemented"

[57]Ward, "To Ensure Deradicalisation Programmes Are Effective, Better Evaluation Practices Must First Be Implemented"

[58]Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez and Boucek, "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists"

[59] Daniel Koehler, *"Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism"* (London: Routledge, 2016), 134

[60] Koehler, *"Understanding Deradicalization"* 135

[61] John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs" *Terrorism and*

Asia's case and the main objectives which have proved important to the stakeholders associated with deradicalization in Central Asian States, a trickle-down tree has been formed adapted from Horgan and Braddock, which identifies the major objectives on a macro level and the minor objectives on a micro level, which are designed to achieve the major objectives[62]. After considering the initiatives taken by Central Asian States whilst also keeping in mind the culture of radicalization in this region, it can be said that the main priority of Central Asian States is to prevent the cases of foreign fighters and public opinion on this subject. Table 1. Shows a basic trickle-down formula under MAUT.

| Cases of Foreign Fighters | Public Opinion |
|---|---|
| Deradicalization of Repatriates | Image Control of Repatriates |
| Preventing Radicalization in the Youth | Pro-Government Sentiments |

*Table 1. MAUT trickle-down tree for Central Asia*

To prevent the cases of foreign fighters it is important for Central Asian States to deradicalize repatriates and take preventive measures to avoid the radicalization of the youth. To make sure the public opinion remains positive, measures for image control of the repatriates need to be taken and due to the history of unstable governments in Central Asia, riots and uproar against the governments need to be controlled to promote pro-government sentiments.

## CVE in Central Asia

The governments of Central Asian States have been heavily involved in the CVE measures along with non-governmental organizations to prevent and counter radicalization. This, however, may not be enough at this point in time as there is a growing rate of prisoners arrested for radicalism and extremism along with the problem of repatriates[63]. States that saw an influx of repatriates had been directed to try foreign fighters at home as the International Criminal Court does not have the jurisdiction to do so, there is a lack of evidence for crimes committed abroad, preventing long term

*Political Violence* 22 no.2 (March 9, 2010): 267-291. Accessed September 21, 2020. doi: 10.1080/09546551003594748

[62]Horgan and Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs"

[63]Lynch III, Bouffard, King, and Vickowski. "The Return of Foreign Fighters to Central Asia: Implications for U.S. Counterterrorism Policy"

imprisonment[64]. This leads to the only suitable option which is to adopt deradicalization programs to prevent further damage. The measures that are in action in Central Asia as of now include:

- Preventing Radicalization in the Youth
- Encouraging Civil Society
- Religious Guidance through Islamic Clerics

In Uzbekistan, the existence of the Mahalla System has contributed to the prevention of radicalization and promoting deradicalization[65]. The Mahalla System provides citizens with a voice and addresses the issues faced by the people on a day to day basis. Mahalla Committees are local bodies which also collaborate with Organizations for Women and the Youth to enhance the quality of life in Uzbekistan[66]. Uzbekistan has also shut down the infamous Jaslyk Prison which was known for inhumane torture methods and poor conditions of its inmates[67]. Shavkat Mirziyoyev the President of Uzbekistan has also removed 16,000 names in relation to radicalism and extremism in 2017 and he stated that 9,500 of these individuals had been provided with employment in hopes of reintegrating and rehabilitating them[68]. Islamic Education through religious clerics or Imams has been prevalent in Uzbekistan which essentially aims to guide individuals regarding questions related to Islam, in an effort to negate citizens from violence[69]. For this purpose, religious centers have been set up to address queries and promote non-violent teachings of Islam under ith the Hanafi

[64]Mubin Shaikh. "ISIS Repatriation in North America: Importing the Threat or Dissipating the Danger? Counter Terrorism, *The Investigative Journal*. (October 23rd, 2019) Accessed September 14th, 2020. https://investigativejournal.org/isis-repatriation-in-north-america-importing-the-threat-or-dissipating-the-danger/

[65]Sarah Lain, "Strategies for Countering Terrorism and Extremism in Central Asia" *Asian Affairs* 47. no.3 (October 24, 2016): 386-405. Accessed September 21, 2020. doi: 10.1080/03068374.2016.1225899

[66]Lain, "Strategies for Countering Terrorism and Extremism in Central Asia"

[67] "Has Mirziyoyev Really Brought Religious Liberty to Uzbekistan?" *Freedom House*, (January 16, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020 https://freedomhouse.org/article/has-mirziyoyev-really-brought-religious-liberty-uzbekistan

[68] Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 - Uzbekistan, *US Department of State* (19 September 2018) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bcf1f734.html

[69]Navruz Melibaev, "Policy of Countering Terrorism and Extremism in Uzbekistan: How Did It Change Over the Past Few Years*?" Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, (April 5, 2020) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://cabar.asia/en/policy-of-countering-terrorism-and-extremism-in-uzbekistan-how-did-it-change-over-the-past-few-years/

School of Thought which prevails in Central Asia[70]. Uzbekistan still has a long way to go to eradicate the remnants of Islam Karimov's policies. The shutting down of the Jaslyk Prison may have been a step in the right direction as far as prison conditions go, however, the psychological aid needed by the inmates should be addressed along with reintegration through employment. To contain the threat of further radicalization through repatriates in prisons, there needs to be a formal deradicalization strategy. Shavkat Mirziyoyev addressed that citizens involved in terrorist activities in Syria and Iraq would have their citizenships revoked[71] to further deter potential foreign fighters.

Kyrgyzstan has worked with Search for Common Ground and the US to deradicalize areas known for having higher tendencies of radicalization[72] – the Jalal-Abad region, where social media campaigns deemed as successful while working with the local bodies[73]. As this area is in proximity to the Ferghana Valley and Uzbekistan, it has more potential for radicalization. Search's efforts were also effective in Aravan, which employed the method of religious leaders using social media to counter hate speech and violence[74]. Premature attempts have been made for prison deradicalization but there is no solidified course of action, however, consulting with imams has led to deradicalization in a few cases[75]. Deradicalization needs to be prioritized in Kyrgyzstan to prevent prison radicalization of other inmates and cases of recidivism. Kyrgyzstan has 204 inmates in prisons for terrorism related

[70]Melibaev, "Policy of Countering Terrorism and Extremism in Uzbekistan: How Did It Change Over the Past Few Years?"

[71] "Uzbekistan repatriates dozens from war-torn Middle East" *Eurasia.net* (May 30, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-repatriates-dozens-from-war-torn-middle-east

[72]Kanykey Jailobaeva and Gulnara Asilbekova, "Social Media for Deradicalization in Kyrgyzstan: A model for Central Asia" Final Project Evaluation, *Search for Common Ground* (November 2017) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/KGZ007_Evaluation_Report_Final_Nov_2017.pdf

[73]Jailobaeva and Asilbekova, "Social Media for Deradicalization in Kyrgyzstan: A model for Central Asia"

[74]Jailobaeva and Asilbekova, "Social Media for Deradicalization in Kyrgyzstan: A model for Central Asia"

[75]Bolo Isaev, "Number of Prisoners Charged with Extremism and Terrorism in Kyrgyzstan Triples in Five Years" *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, (October 21, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://cabar.asia/en/number-of-prisoners-charged-with-extremism-and-terrorism-in-kyrgyzstan-triples-in- five-years/

crimes, which poses a threat of radicalizing other inmates[76]. The radicalized inmates can have visitors and may also make phone calls which may aid in keeping inmates in touch with their families and may provide for some relief and possibly a cognitive opening.

Under the Operation Zhusan in Kazakhstan, 17 rehabilitation centers were set up to contain the repatriates returning to their homeland[77]. The rehabilitation centers are facilitated by psychiatrists, counselors and religious clerics and have also collaborated with Kazakh NGOs – Ak-Niet and Pravo[78]. Kazakhstan's strategy has been centered on 3 R's which are repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation[79]. For prison deradicalization, there is no solid strategy, however, counseling is available through psychiatrists and religious clerics to provide radicalized inmates with guidance[80]. According to the Deputy Chairman of the Committee of Religious Affairs, 256 members of radical organizations have left radicalism behind since the formation of Ak-Niet in 2014[81]. Kazakhstan has also pushed for youth centered preventive measures towards radicalization and encouraged civil society whilst advocating for overall secularization. Kazakhstan has quickly addressed the growing crisis of repatriates; however, the imprisoned persons also need to be catered to whilst devising strategies in the event that prisoners are released, to help find employment and reintegrate into society. Kazakhstan has also had to deal with missing birth certificates, proof of identity and nationality for repatriates, i t is crucial to handle the situation of women and children as to prevent radicalization and the separation of children from their mothers[82].

Tajikistan granted amnesty to prisoners convicted of charges related to extremism and radicalism, under the condition that they are not to re-offend

[76]Isaev, "Number of Prisoners Charged with Extremism and Terrorism in Kyrgyzstan Triples in Five Years"

[77]Stevan Weine, "Rehabilitating the Islamic State's Women and Children Returnees in Kazakhstan" *Just Security* (December 12, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://www.justsecurity.org/67694/rehabilitating-the-islamic-states-women-and- children-returnees-in-kazakhstan/

[78] "Kazakhstan: repatriation of 595 citizens from Syria" *Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations*, (April 23, 2020) accessed September 20, 2020. https://bulaninstitute.org/kazakhstan-repatriation-of-595-citizens- from-syria/

[79]Gussarova. "Repatriating Foreign Fighters: The Case of Kazakhstan"

[80]Kazakhstan: repatriation of 595 citizens from Syria" Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations

[81] "More than 300 groups on religious work with youth of Kazakhstan" *Human Capital, Kazakhstan 2050 Our Power*, (September 23, 2018) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://2018.strategy2050.kz/en/news/39124/

[82]Gussarova, "Repatriating Foreign Fighters: The Case of Kazakhstan"

and were encouraged to opt for education and employment[83]. The public opinion was in favor of this decision[84]. Tajikistan has worked to prevent radicalization in the youth and promoting civil society by promoting sports and spreading awareness via social media[85]. Several repatriates have worked with the government to promote messages regarding the dangers of terrorism[86]. After experiencing two prison riots linked to IS in 2019[87], the need for prison deradicalization has grown, however, there is no solid scheme, despite the growing number of inmates arrested for violence related to radicalism. Tajikistan has also pushed for secularization and imposed strict prohibitions on the practice of Islam[88]hoping of preventing radicalization which may have the opposite effect as repatriates may find this to be threatening to their beliefs. There have been talks regarding the separation of terrorism related prisoners from "ordinary" prisoners to prevent the flourishing of radicalism in prisons as there have already been reported factions of "Hizbs" within the prisons and distribution of content that may lead to radicalization[89].

Turkmenistan has strict control over the information that reaches the rest of the world. Turkmenistan is part of the C5+1, as well as the OSCE and has

[83]Farangis Najibullah and Mumin Ahmadi, "Why Tajikistan Is Fighting to Bring Its Islamic State Widows Back Home" *RadioFreeEurope/Radio Liberty*, (February 21, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://www.rferl.org/a/why-tajikistan-is-fighting-to-bring-its-islamic-state-widows-back- home/29782787.html

[84]Najibullah and Ahmadi, "Why Tajikistan Is Fighting to Bring Its Islamic State Widows Back Home"

[85] "Towards a comprehensive implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia Mapping of PVE and CT Initiatives in Central Asia" *United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia*. (March 21, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://unrcca.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/pve_ct_mapping_2019_-_21-03-2019.pdf

[86]Najibullah and Ahmadi, "Why Tajikistan Is Fighting to Bring Its Islamic State Widows Back Home"

[87] Mazhab Djuma. "Tajikistan: How to Prevent the Spread of Extremism in Prisons" *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, (April 10, 2020) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://cabar.asia/en/tajikistan- how-to-prevent-the-spread-of-extremism-in-prisons/

[88]Funk, "The Deterioration of Religious Freedom: Tajikistan's Attempt to Counter Violent Extremism" m

[89]Djuma. "Tajikistan: How to Prevent the Spread of Extremism in Prisons"

collaborated with the two on CVE training[90]. The issue regarding foreign fighters had been discussed at a conference in Ashgabat in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB), the Regional Office for Central Asia (ROCA) and the Programme Office in Turkmenistan[91]. Turkmen crossing the border to fight alongside IS was discussed, however, it did not address the cases of repatriates and Turkmenistan's strategy regarding repatriates as there is a higher number of foreign fighters from Turkmenistan[92]. Turkmenistan is not equipped to deal with radicalized individuals or repatriates which may be alarming coupled with the isolation policy and the corrupt government and the economic crisis[93]. Turkmenistan needs to prioritize the repatriate's crisis and accommodate and facilitate the repatriates accordingly which may be possible in cooperation with other Central Asian States.

## Recommendations

For Central Asia, the crisis of foreign fighters returning may cause further complications if the repatriates are not dealt with swiftly. The women and children may have been radicalized as they have been accompanied by foreign fighters who may have been imprisoned upon returning. Prison deradicalization needs to be prioritized as this can cause radicalization amongst other inmates. The rehabilitation, reintegration and deradicalization should be dealt with to prevent cases of recidivism and although Central Asian States have made efforts to do so, they need to be more thorough and solidified whilst recording the cases of recidivism to effectively measure the success of deradicalization and CVE efforts. Inter-regional cooperation may also prove to be effective as Central Asian States can adapt policies and models implemented after evaluating what has been successful and what has failed in neighboring states. Central Asia has also had a history of inhumane prison conditions which require reformation to prevent psychological damage and further displacement of aggression.

Displacement of aggression may also be caused by the strict laws regarding the practicing of religion in Central Asia which are although designed to

[90] Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Turkmenistan, *US Department of State*, (2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/turkmenistan/

[91] Akram Umarov, "How Serious is Religious Radicalization in Turkmenistan?" *European Eye on Radicalization*, (June 18, 2019) Accessed September 21, 2020. https://eeradicalization.com/how-serious- is-religious-radicalization-in-turkmenistan/

[92] Lynch III, Bouffard, King, and Vickowski, "The Return of Foreign Fighters to Central Asia: Implications for U.S. Counterterrorism Policy"

[93] Umarov, "How Serious is Religious Radicalization in Turkmenistan?"

prevent radicalization may in fact be counter-production as the Hizb ut-Tahrir remains to be a popular organization in Central Asia despite being banned[94], hence the religious impositions and bans may be further pushing individuals towards radicalization. The problem of imprisonment of political opposition is a recurring trend in Central Asia where political prisoners are often accused of extremism related charges which may lead to confusion and the neglect of individuals who are in fact radicalized and need to be facilitated accordingly. The costs and resources needed for deradicalization programs and the reintegration of repatriates and ex-convicts must be addressed accordingly. The women and children need to be dealt with extra care and preparations must be made for the adoption of orphans. The issue of missing documents may also need to be addressed as this causes problem due to lack of evidence and proof of identity which is a growing problem for each state around the world[95], that has accepted repatriates in the aftermath of the demise of IS. With the aid of repatriates i.e. addressing the public, potential foreign fighters or radicalized individuals can be deterred from committing similar crimes due to fear of prosecution and the horrors of war.

## Conclusion

With the growing number of repatriates in Central Asia, deradicalization seems to be a sure way to contain the growing threat. Deradicalization takes place if radicalization has already taken place and seeks to undo the radicalization process, hence why importance is placed on the ideological and psychological factors which contribute to radicalization eventually progressing towards acts of violence. This may be the reason why disengagement is differentiated from deradicalization as disengagement has more to do with the behavioral and social changes whereas deradicalization deals with bringing about a cognitive change in the psyche of an individual, making deradicalization more complex and requiring extra clarification and assessment to design programs which are equipped with the crucial resources needed for deradicalization. In Central Asia, there is a growing number of prisoners and for this purpose deradicalization programs in this region need to be implemented with precision and accuracy as Central Asia is already a region that has been vulnerable to radical organizations, along with poor governing may lead to crises which may be difficult to contain if ignored for a longer period.

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[94] Galina M. Yemelianova. "Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir" *Central Asian Survey* 32, no.1 (January 17, 2013):109-111. Accessed September 21, 2020. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2012.754606

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# MAKHTUM QULI FARAGHI: A SYMBOL OF TURKMEN UNITY

**Muhammad Ali Dinakhel***

## Abstract

*Makhtum Quli Faraghi (1733-1807) is a Turkmen philosophical poet, Sufi scholar, spiritual leader. Turkmen poetry reached its high point with Makhtum Quli Faraghi. Faraghi is called the father of Turkmen literature. He is first poet to consider all Turkmen as one nation. His followers continued his tradition in Turkmen literature that was to praise beauty, truth, justice and goodness. His legacy was struggle for independence, unity, peace, justice, modesty, brotherhood and equality for all. He was not only a symbol of Turkmen unity but also a common voice of Turkish and Islamic world. Integrity and unity of Turkmen nation and the idea of Turkmen way being sacred was promoted by him. He praised and glorified Turkmen culture. He has criticized the negative role of Mullah and Khan in Turkmen society. This article analysed themes of Faraghi's poetry in the light of the theory of New Historicism and discovered answer to the question that why Faraghi is considered a symbol of Turkmen unity.*

**Keywords:** Turkmen, Turkmen poetry, Makhtum Quli Faraghi, Turkmenistan, Turkmen Unity, Turkmen Identity.

Two theoretical approaches to the analysis of a literary work are mostly applied while analyzing a piece of literature. The first one is New Criticism. According to this theory, a text is autonomous and can be studied without knowing its context. The other theoretical approach to literature is the theory of New Historicim. Under this theoretical framework, a literary piece can be interpreted and analysed while keeping in view the historical context in which a particular literary work comes into existence. Besides context and background history of the era, it is also important to consider personal history of the writer. A theoretical framework of New Historicism with inductive and deductive thematic analysis methodology have been applied

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on this study. As already discussed that New Historicism requires knowledge of the personal history of the writer and historical context of the production of a literary work, therefore, it is necessary to describe historical background and personal information of Makhtum Quli Faraghi.
Makhtum Quli Faraghi was a Turkmen poet and Sufi scholar. He is the leader of the spiritual life of the Turkmen people. His name is written in variations like in Persian as Makhtum Quli Faraghi, in Turkmen as Magtymguly Pyragy,in Turkish as Mahtumkulu Firaki. In Urdu as Makhdum Quli Faraghi. The Turkmen dialect spoken in Iran has a close similarity with Turkish, so they call the peot as Mahtumkuli Firaki. In this article Makhtum Quli Faraghi will be used.

Makhtum Quli Faraghi's father name is Devlet Mommed Azadi [Dawlat Muhammad Azadi]. He was a well known poet.[1] He born in the town of Atrek in May 1733.[2] He born near the city of Gonbad-e-Qabus in Gorgan province of north-east Iran and buried near [Aaaq Toqai ] Aktokay (آق طوقي) village, also in Iran.[3] He Educated in Persian but wrote in Turkmen, that is why he is highly regarded within Turkmenistan.[4] In one of his couplets, Makhtum Quli, describes his name as Makhtumkuli and place name as Etrek. [5] The region of Etrek is situated near the Caspian Sea where Iran and Turkmenistan meet.
He studied the religious and secular sciences of his time.[6] He got his education in Khiva and Bukhara. He was fluent in Persian, Arabic and other Turkic languages. He received his early education from his father, Daulat Muhammad Azadi, in Arabic and Persian languages. Azadi was a leading scholar at that time. Azadi was a naqshbandi Sufi. He has visied many lands including modern Turkmenistan. He always thought and prayed for the salvation of his people. Makhtum Quli Faraghi was a prominent literary figure of Chaghtai language which was dominant Turkic language of his region.

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[1] Ahmad Hasan Dani, Makhtum Quli: The Poet of Turkmens, *Journal of Central Asia*, XX(1), (Islamabad, Centre for Central Asia Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, July, 1997), p. 65
[2] Ibid, p. 67
[3] *Makhtumkuli*, (The British Museum). Retrieved from: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG192014 dated 14th February 2021.
[4] *Makhtumkuli*, (The British Museum). Retrieved from: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG192014 dated 14th February 2021.
[5] Raido Free Europe Radio Liberty, *Turkmen Celebrate their National Poet*. Retrieved from: https://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-turkmenistan-makhtumkuli/25384568.html on dated 14th February 2021.
[6] Atadjan N. Molamov, Magtymguly Fragi: A Classic Turkmen Poet Urdu Translation, *Diplomatic Focus, 5(12)*, (Islamabad: Mian Fazal Elahi, December 2014), p. 31

Turkmenistan got independence on 27th October 1991 and on18th May 1992 Turkmenistan adopted its constitution.[7] This day is actual day of celebration of his legacy that was struggle for independence, unity, peace, justice, modesty, brotherhood and equality for all.[8] On May 18th every year his birth day is officially celebrated at high level in Turkmenistan. This day is marked as Revival, Unity and Poetry Day of Makhtum Quli. On this day, thousands of people from all over the world visit his tomb at Aaaq Toqai in Iran to pay homage to this great poet.[9] He is revered beyond the physical boarders of nowadays Turkmenistan and even Turkic world, for his philosophy, deep knowledge, Sufism and love to God.[10] The government of Turkmenistan has named District Garagala after his name which is the native town of Makhtum Quli Faraghi. The highest international award of Turkmenistan on literature is named after this visionary poet Makhtum Quli Faraghi. Every year the president of Turkmenistan confers this award on the most renowned Turkmen and foreign poets, scholars and philosophers for their distinctive work in their respective fields. Turkmen State University was named as Makhtum Quli Faraghi State University to pay homage to the great poet. By a presidential decree the year 2014 was declared as the 'Year of Celebrations' and to hold large scale festivities in honour of the 290th birth day anniversary of the great classic Turkmen poet, Makhtum Quli Faraghi. [11] Among all literary genres of Turkmen literature, poetry is the best reflection of their culture. Daulat Muhammad Azadi (1700–60), the father of Makhtum Quli Faraghi, wrote didactic poems in Turkmen language. It was Makhtum Quli Faraghi who took the Turkmen poetry to its high point.[12] He was not only a symbol of Turkmen unity but also a common voice of Turkish and Islamic world. Makhtum Quli was a sufi and philosophical poet and a spiritual leader of Turkmen people. He is prominent literary figure in Turkmen literary history and is called the father of Turkmen literature. He is equally placed, in a broader context, alongside prominent literary figures of the Turkic world. These literary figures of the Turkic world include: Fizuli, Alisher Navoi, Yunus Emre, and Khwaja Ahmad Yasawi.

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[7] Tahir Mansoor Farooqi, (Urdu Translator), *Turkmanistan Khushali Ki Dehliz Par* (Turkmenistan at the doorstep of Prosperity) by Saparmurat Niyazov Turkmenbashi, (Lahore, Classic, 1999), p.121

[8] Atadjan N. Molamov, Magtymguly Fragi: A Classic Turkmen Poet Urdu Translation, *Diplomatic Focus, 5(12)*, (Islamabad: Mian Fazal Elahi, December 2014), p. 28

[9] Atadjan N. Molamov, Magtymguly Fragi: A Classic Turkmen Poet Urdu Translation, *Diplomatic Focus, 5(12)*, (Islamabad: Mian Fazal Elahi, December 2014), p. 32

[10] Ibid, p. 29

[11] Ibid, p. 32

[12] Kayumov,A., et al., Turkic and Mongolian Literature, *History of Civilizations of Central Asia, V*, Edited by Chahryar Adle and Irfan Habib, (Paris: UNESCO, 2003), P.723

Muhammad Wali Kamina (1770–1840), Sayyed Nazar Sayyidı (1775–1836), Qurban Durdy, Zelili (1785–1846), Mulla Nafis (1810–62) and Murad Talibi (1766–1848) are prominent literary figures of Turkmen literature during eighteenth and nineteenth century. Makhtum Quli Faraghi has its literary impact on all of these prominent literary figures. These poets and writers followed the literary tradition of Makhtum Quli in Turkmen literature. Fundamentals of this literary tradition were the praise beauty, truth, justice and goodness.[13] Berdakh (1827–1900) an eminent representative of Karakalpak literature acknowledges his debt to Makhtum Quli and other masters in other Turkic languages like expertise of Navoi in grammar, expertise of Fuzuli in the selection of words and eloquence of Makhtum Quli.[14]

He made great struggles to get autonomy and freedom for Turkmen people in the 18th century. In one of his couplets he says that Turkmen always chase their enemies to their homes.[15] Makhtum Quli sings the praises of his homeland. He believes that greatest of misfortunes for a nation is the loss of their country.[16] He has dreamt about this indepenndent Turkmen State.[17]

He worked for the integrity and unity of Turkmen people. He also wrote about declaraing the Turkmen-way sacred. He was promoting Turkmen unity and integrity but during his lifetime, he hardly succeeded in his efforts to overcome the tribal rivalries and loyalties. He always tried to minimize tribal conflicts and rivalries. He appealed to all the disintegrated Turkmen tribes to unite and consolidate as a nation and as a state. He is first poet to consider all Turkmen as one nation. [18] He further describes the ways of integration of various tribes and clans.
The tribes are brothers, clans are good friends

[13] Ibid, P. 723
[14] Ibid, P.722
[15] Ahmad Hasan Dani, "Makhtum Quli: The Poet of Turkmens", *Journal of Central Asia*, XX(1), (Islamabad, Centre for Central Asia Quaid-i-Azam University July, 1997), p. 65
[16] Kayumov,A., et al., Turkic and Mongolian Literature, *History of Civilizations of Central Asia, V,* Edited by Chahryar Adle and Irfan Habib, (Paris: UNESCO, 2003), P.723
[17] Tahir Mansoor Farooqi, (Urdu Translator), *Turkmanistan Khushali Ki Dehliz Par* (Turkmenistan at the doorstep of Prosperity) by Saparmurat Niyazov Turkmenbashi, (Lahore, Classic, 1999), p.82
[18] Atadjan N. Molamov, Magtymguly Fragi: A Classic Turkmen Poet Urdu Translation, *Diplomatic Focus, 5(12),* (Islamabad: Mian Fazal Elahi, December 2014), p. 31

Fats does not oppose him, he is God's light[19]

He always emphasized unity of Turkmen nation in his poetry as he said in the following verses.
Hey Turkmens! Get united!
Blood brother Teke, Yomud, Saryk, Alili, all tribes get united!
Create a common land and empower it
And break the chains in your hearts
By sharing common faith. [20]

A few poets and writers wrote in Chaghtai language. Central Asians Khans used Chaghatai as their court language. Makhtum Quli was one of the first Turkmen poets to write in this language. He promoted it as a literary language. He also incorporated many linguistic features of Turkmen language in this language. In his poetry he has tried to increase the use of Turkic languages. Traditionally Persian was a dominant literary language. On account of all these efforts for the promotion of Turkmen language, he was called the founder of Turkmen language, literature, poetry. As stated earlier that he educated in Persian but wrote in Turkmen. Therefore, he is highly regarded within Turkmenistan.[21] Turkmen language particularly developed in Eighteenth century which is called Golden Age for Turkmen language and literature. According to Barthold Turkmen is the only nations among the Turkic nations that they have Makhtum Quli Faraghi as their own national poet. Turkmen language became quite different from the other Turkic languages because Makhtum Quli wrote his poetry in the common and colloquial language that all Turkmens could understand.[22] He created conditions for forming in its present shape of the Turkmen language, spoken by the millions of people around the world.[23] When Makhtum Quli was young, Turkmen was an underdeveloped language. Chaghtai and Persian were dominant languages for writers and scholars of those days. Makhtumkuli changed that for his people. By writing poetry in Turkmen language, he contributed to the richness and promotion of this language. He deeply influenced Turkmen language. It can be compared with the impact of

[19] Ahmad Hasan Dani, "Makhtum Quli: The Poet of Turkmens", *Journal of Central Asia*, XX(1), (Islamabad, Centre for Central Asia Quaid-i-Azam University July, 1997), p. 65
[20] Atadjan N. Molamov, Magtymguly Fragi: A Classic Turkmen Poet Urdu Translation, *Diplomatic Focus, 5(12)*, (Islamabad: Mian Fazal Elahi, December 2014), p. 31
[21] *Makhtumkuli*, (The British Museum). Retrieved from: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG192014 dated 14th February 2021.
[22] M. Annanepesov, *The Turkmens, in History of Civilizations of Central Asi Vol. V*, Edited by Chahryar Adle and Irfan Habib, (Paris, UNESCO, 2003), Pp. 139, 140
[23] Atadjan N. Molamov, Magtymguly Fragi: A Classic Turkmen Poet Urdu Translation, *Diplomatic Focus, 5(12)*, (Islamabad: Mian Fazal Elahi, December 2014), p. 28

Shakespeare's on English. Presently Turkmenistan wants to learn their people three languages: Turkmen, Russian and English. They also introduced a new script based on Latin alphabets.[24]

He wrote in different genres and on different topics and themes. He wrote patriotic poems as well as subjective lyrical poems. On account of the diversity in his poetic works he is considered the founder of Turkmen literature.[25] Turkmen people all over the world has a reverence for him. Turkmen people quote his verses as proverbs. As already discussed that he used simple and colloquial language for understanding of common people, similarly he also prefer folkloric genre like *qoshuk*. He widely used this genre for his poetry. There are eight or eleven syllables in the quatrains of this genre. It forms rhyming scheme for its initial stanza like ABCB for the second stanza is CCCB. The remaining stanzas follow rhyming scheme of DDDB. The traditional singers [Bakhshis] adopted the poems of Makhtum Quli with traditional musical forms on account of its compatibility. As already pointed out that his poetry is lyrical and subjective but he has also discussed themes of humanity. He wrote elegy poems on the deaths of his father and children. He also wrote poetry regarding the disappearance of his brothers. Themes like criticism on mullahs and khans, praise of religious personalities and twelve Imams are also visible in his poetry. The theme of laments at losing of his beloved is also present in his subjective and personal poetry.

The secret of the global and universal acceptance and popularity of his poetry is in the exaltation of and love of humanity.

The role of human in this world
Spiritual cleanliness of human beings
Sincere belief in God and the people[26]

Professor Naseem Ahmad Shah, the Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies University of Kashmir, India translated his poetry into Urdu. Makhtum Quli Faraghi medal was conferred upon him by the president of Turkmenistan in recognition of his sacrifice and tribute to intellectual insights in delivering the essence of these magnificent poems to the people of India and Pakistan.[27]A launching ceremony of Urdu translation of

[24] Tahir Mansoor Farooqi, (Urdu Translator), *Turkmanistan Khushali Ki Dehliz Par* (Turkmenistan at the doorstep of Prosperity) by Saparmurat Niyazov Turkmenbashi, (Lahore: Classic, 1999), p.125

[25] M. Annanepesov, *The Turkmens, in History of Civilizations of Central Asi Vol. V*, Edited by Chahryar Adle and Irfan Habib, (Paris, UNESCO, 2003), Pp. 139, 140

[26] Atadjan N. Molamov, Magtymguly Fragi: A Classic Turkmen Poet Urdu Translation, *Diplomatic Focus, 5(12)*, (Islamabad: Mian Fazal Elahi, December 2014), p. 31

[27] Ibid., p. 29

Makhtum Quli's poetry was held at Islamabad by Turkmenistan Embassy at Islamabad in 2014 on the occasion of 290th birth anniversary of the poet.

مختوم قلی شکر کر اللہ کا
موت برابر ہے غریب اور شاہ کا
عاشق ہے تو صبر کر بلا کا
بے صبر کے گھر کی شاہی مات ہوگا[28]

His poems have been translated into many other languages of the world like Urdu, Turkish, Arabic, Spanish, English, Russian, Ukrainian, Kazakh, Uzbek, Chinese, Korean, Persian and others. [29]

Araz Muhammad Sarli has written about his education, life, death and mouselum in the following passage.

> یکی از شاعران بزرگ و مشهور ترکمن مختومقلی فراغی است که درمیان بحر خزر و جیحون نغمه هائ آزادی می سرود ـ او مدتی در مدرسه شیر غازی تحصیل کرد ـ آرمانهائ والائ او در دیوان معرفش که بزبان ترکمنی است، منعکس می باشد. وی در سال ۱۲۰۳ هجری وفات یافت، آرامگاه او در نوار مرزی ایران و ترکمانستان و درداخل خاک ایران، در روستائی به نام آق طوقی واقع است ـ در بهار هر سال در این مکان به مناسبت بزرگداشت ایام فراغی مراسمی ترتیب می باید ـ[30]

Makhtum Quli's most famous poem is "Türkmeniň" [of the Turkmen]. This poem praise Turkmen culture and describes geography of the Turkmen people. Turkmen living in Iran loved these verses. This poem motivated Turkmen people in Iran during revolution for their independence.

Makhtum Quli is the healer of the Human Soul. He contributed to the spiritual revival of Turkmen society.[31] He is the first Turkmen poet-Philosopher who set up moral code for the conduct of Turkmen society.

Both Makhtum Quli and Iqbal are national poets of Turkmenistan and Pakistan respectively. Although they lived in different places and at different times but close similarities are found in the concepts and ideas of the two poets. It is true that both of these great poets Makhtum Quli and Iqbal don't belong to a particular nation or a particular country because their themes are universal. They belong to all of the people and shine like sun over their heads. They are above the geographical boundaries. They have broken

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[28] Ahmad Hasan Dani, "Makhtum Quli: The Poet of Turkmens", *Journal of Central Asia*, XX(1), (Islamabad, Centre for Central Asia Quaid-i-Azam University July, 1997), p. 6۴

[29] Atadjan N. Molamov, Magtymguly Fragi: A Classic Turkmen Poet Urdu Translation, *Diplomatic Focus, 5(12)*, (Islamabad: Mian Fazal Elahi, December 2014), p. 29

[30] Araz Mohammad Sarli, *Tarikh-i-Turkmanistan Vol. I [The History of Turkmenistan]*, Tehran, Daftar-i-Mutale;at Siyasi wa Bain al milali, 1373 [1994],

[31] Zulfiqar Ali Qureshi, Magtymguly Fragi: Poetic Collection, *Diplomatic Focus, 5(12)*, (Islamabad: Mian Fazal Elahi, December 2014), p. 30

barriers of cast and creed. The one and the same idea, as mentioned in the following couplets, communicated by these two poets reflect their similarity of thoughts and with different although style of expression is different:
Iqbal says:

عطّارؔ ہو، رومیؔ ہو، رازیؔ ہو، غزالیؔ ہو
کچھ ہاتھ نہیں آتا بے آہِ سحَرگاہی

In this couplet he refers to great Sufis, philosophers and thinkers, like Imam Ghazali, Fakhruddin Razi, Jalaluddin Rumi, and Fariduddin Attar and says that withoutout awakening in the early morning and shedding tears, success is not possible. He emphasized the development of the habit of rising early in the morning. During early dawn, one can cultivate solitude.
Makhtum Quli, in his poem, "This is the Time", also communicate the same idea. He highlights the importance of this prime time of the day, the Dawn. According to Makhtum Quli, he has explored truth in this time and therefore he tries to motivate his followers to take advantage and knowledge during dawn. This is the time for reaching the truth and sublime.
Both Makhtum Quli and Iqbal were always thinking for the unity of their respective nations. As Turkmen people were divided into clans and tribes and have no united homeland of their own. Faraghi united them as a nation made up of tribes and clans.[32] He always try to convey the message of unity to Turkmen people. In the following couplets he also says:
Hey Turkmens! Get united!
Blood brother Teke, Yomud, Saryk, Alili, all tribes get united!
Create a common land and empower it
And break the chains in your hearts
By sharing common faith. [33]

Similarities of ideas and thoughts in these two poets do not end there but go on. Both of the poets dreamed of independent homelands for their nations.[34]

## The Turkmen Character and Way of Life

Makhtum Quli Faraghi personified the mentality and high spirit of Turkmen people. Many Russian explorers and European travelers remarked that there are unique features in the Turkmen way of life. Turkmen people are hospitable, open hearted, fearless, and brave. They are honest in business

[32] Ahmad Hasan Dani, "Makhtum Quli: The Poet of Turkmens", *Journal of Central Asia*, XX(1), (Islamabad, Centre for Central Asia Quaid-i-Azam University July, 1997), p. 65
[33] Atadjan N. Molamov, Magtymguly Fragi: A Classic Turkmen Poet Urdu Translation, *Diplomatic Focus, 5(12)*, (Islamabad: Mian Fazal Elahi, December 2014), p. 31
[34] http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/apr99/8.htm retrieved on 14th February 2021.

and trade. They treat women in a good way. Even the children knew their tribe, clan and genealogy. They have their own customary law (*ādat*). The proverb, 'the Turkmens need neither the shade of the tree nor the halls of power' was attributed to them. Vambéry has said that no one among the Turkmens want to take command or who wished to be a subordinate.
Makhtum Quli Faraghi developed a personality and a "Turkemn" character, which he expresses below.
The wind of the Turkmen expands from the desert.
From the dark mountains the flood of Turkmen camels.
The Turkmen desert does not drown into basil.
The beautiful land of the Turkmen catches the colt.
It does not know unevenness, the son of the lion of the Turkmen.
The dam wont hold it, if the Turkmen flood comes.
My uncle shines amber of the Turkmen rose.
The way of the Turkmen walks on yow.
Makhtum Quli speaks the language of the Turkmen.

He knew all of features of his people. Actually he caught the real nature of his people and that is why he is successful in addressing his people.
He sits out in high spirits, sorrows feels not
He smashes through rocks, his way is not blocked
My eye alights on none else, nor will my heart
Rejoice elsewhere
speaks in the tongue of the Turkmen[35]

Turkmen people are indebted to the blessings of Jihun (Syr Darya), feel that it is a mercy of God. Faraghi also praises Jihun and locate Turkmen between the Khazar and Jihun sea.[36] Horse is their companion. They remember the genealogy of their horse. Horse is a dominant symbol of Faraghi's poetry.

His heart rejoices as he mounts his horse
At his glance the mountains turn to rubies
The sea overflows, bringing him honey
It will not be contained when it comes
The river of the Turkemn[37]
Turkmen cannot but be a hero. The hero in him is ancestral. Faraghi describe this heroism in Turkmen character.[38]

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[35] Ahmad Hasan Dani, "Makhtum Quli: The Poet of Turkmens", *Journal of Central Asia*, XX(1), (Islamabad, Centre for Central Asia Quaid-i-Azam University July, 1997), pp. 66, 67
[36] Ibid., p. 67
[37] Ibid., p. 68
[38] Ibid., p. 69

They call their president Turkmanbashi, the great leader of the Turkmen, a title so fitting in a tribal Turkmen society. We see this picture in the following lines.
His fairy-maids go forth clad in red and green
From them wafts the scent of ambergris
Bek, prince, and elder are the lords of the country
Together they uphold the beautiful land of the Turkmen[39]
Past history is reverberated in the poetry of .
He tries to make them united.
Hey Turkmens, get united……

His songs make Turkmen people struggling in their harsh desert life to drive their camels and horses just to remind the enemy.
On the day of battle he is not caught unaware
He is captured neither by curse nor evil eye
It is not deprived of its nightingale, does not wilt
Or wither
Always smelling of musk is the rose of the Turkmen[40]

Turkmen character can be found in their films and dramas. A Decisive Step and Daughter in Law are very popular Turkmen films.[41]
Makhtum Quli Faraghi is ranked high among his contemporary poets, thinkers and scholars not only in Turkmenistan and Turkic world but also in South Asia like Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Faiz Ahmad faiz of Pakistan, Ghalib of India, Rabindernath of Bangladesh, Sadi and Omar Khayam of Iran, Jalaluddin Romi of Turkey, Alisher Navoi of Uzbekistan, Abai Qunanbaev of Kazakhstan, Aini of Tajikistan. [42]
The mausoleum of Makhtum Quli faraghi is in Aktokay (آق طوقي) village in north-eastern Iran. A mausoleum has been constructed by Iranian government on the grave of Makhtum Quli Faraghi.[43]

[39] Ibid., p. 69
[40] Ibid., p. 72
[41] Tahir Mansoor Farooqi, (Urdu Translator), *Turkmanistan Khushali Ki Dehliz Par (Turkmenistan at the doorstep of Prosperity)* by Saparmurat Niyazov Turkmenbashi, Lahore, Classic, 1999, p.134
[42] Atadjan N. Molamov, Magtymguly Fragi: A Classic Turkmen Poet Urdu Translation, *Diplomatic Focus, 5(12)*, (Islamabad: Mian Fazal Elahi, December 2014), p. 31
[43] Araz Mohammad Sarli, *Tarikh-i-Turkmanistan Vol. I [The History of Turkmenistan]*, (Tehran: Daftar-i-Mutale;at Siyasi wa Bain al milali, 1373 [1994])

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## Conclusion

Makhtum Quli Faraghi is considered as the symbol of the unity of Turkmen people because he explored the ingredients of the identity and unity of Turkmen people and presented in a very impressive way in his poetry. He always tried to minimize tribal conflicts and rivalries to promote unity and avoid disunity among Turkmen tribes and clans. Turkmen unity is the dominant theme in his poetry. He caught the real nature of Turkmen people and personified their mentality and high spirit. He glorified Turkmen land, rivers and people and created patriotism of Turkmen people with their land. His legacy was struggle for independence and unity of Turkmen people. His legacy of Turkmen unity was continued by his followers and his contemporary poets. Makhtum Quli Faraghi is considered as the symbol of Turkmen unity and a common voice of Turkic and Islamic world. He underlined the idea of keeping sacred the Turkmen way and Turkmen character. He sought ways for the promotion of integrity and unity of Turkmen nation. To keep him remembered as a symbol of the unity of Turkmen nation, every year 18th May is celebrated as unity and poetry day of Faraghi.

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Sarli, A.M. *Tarikh-i-Turkmanistan Vol. I [The History of Turkmenistan]*. Tehran: Daftar-i-Mutale;at Siyasi wa Bain al milali, 1994.

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# THE INCONCLUSIVE REPATRIATION OF AFGHAN REFUGEES FROM PAKISTAN: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

**Muhammad Khan[*] & Hassan Farooq**[**]

## Abstract

*Refugees and internally displaced persons are inescapable remnants of wars, political turbulence and natural disasters. Historically, people confronting religious and racial persecutions used to leave for non-violent regions, but presently political subjugation is the major cause of enforced migration. The settlement of around eighty million displaced persons worldover is a paramount global challenge. The refugees, displaced persons and migrants occasionally gain worldwide significant for serving the political interests of various great powers; otherwise, along with their host nations they bear least worth for the world powers. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 out-broke more than four million refugees into Pakistan. The West, especially the United States (US) as part of their anti-Communist Cold War agenda, lavishly assisted the Afghan Mujahidin, as they had launched guerilla warfare against the Soviet troops. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1992 initiated a large scale repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan after the Russian withdrawal from Kabul. Another massive repatriation program was also initiated in 2002 after the collapse of the Taliban regime by the US led International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF). However, the terrible economic and security situations in Afghanistan spoiled the fruits of repatriations. On the other hand, Pakistan seeks the repatriation of millions of Afghans from its soil at the earliest, while the UNHCR, the refugees and Afghanistan have been apparently adopting the time-gaining strategy. An in-depth study of this highly complex issue reveals that Islamabad has yet to table a comprehensive repatriation plan, Kabul is incapable and inadvertent*

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*to the issue and the global community has least interest in the Afghan refugees. Pakistan and the refugees have been suffering since decades.*

**Keywords:** Cold War, ISAF, Durand-Line, refugees, repatriation, UNHCR

## Introduction

The presence of millions of Afghan refugees for several decades has multiplied the social, political, economic and security challenges of Pakistan. The inadvertent behaviour of international community, the incapability of Kabul and Islamabad's failure to work out a comprehensive and consistent policy for the repatriation of Afghans from its soil; has horrendously complicated the issue. Initially the Afghan refugees were welcomed and generously supported by various stakeholders, for their worth in the anti-communist campaign.[1] Nevertheless, ever since the culmination of Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, these refugees have lost their worth both for the West and the international community. Eventually, the Afghan refugees and their host, Pakistan, have been helplessly confronting enormous challenges. Islamabad has been earnestly demanding the repatriation of Afghan refugees from its soil at the earliest; particularly, due to its intricate security and wavering economy.

The issues like; the loss of interest from the international community, the wretched economic and security situation in Afghanistan, the incapable and inadvertent Kabul regimes towards the repatriation and resettlement of millions of distressed Afghans in exile; have further complicated the challenges for the refugees and their host, Pakistan. Although, Islamabad has never ratified the international conventions pertaining to the issues of refugees, still it has held the title of being the world's largest refugees hosting country in the world for decades and currently it clenches the position of the second largest host to the refugees, worldover.[2] In addition, Pakistan is also accredited as the worst sufferer of the problem in the world.[3] Though, the international community acknowledges this fact, yet it shows least interests to assist Pakistan in handling the paramount challenge of repatriation or resettlement of the millions of refugees in their native country.

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[1] Rudiger Schoch. "*Afghan refugees in Pakistan during the 1980s: cold war politics and registration practice. Research Paper No. 157.* (UNHCR, 2008)."

[2] Yousaf Ali, Muhammad Sabir, and Noor Muhammad. "Refugees and host country nexus: A case study of Pakistan." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 20, no. 1 (2019): 137-153.

[3] Ghosh, Sucharita, and Ali Enami. "Do refugee-immigrants affect international trade? Evidence from the world's largest refugee case." *Journal of Policy Modeling* 37, no. 2 (2015): 291-307.

The West, particularly the US, benignly supported Islamabad and the Afghan *Mujahidin* (*the plural of Mujahid – an Arabic term used for strugglers or strivers for justice, right conduct and Godly rule)* in their sacred fight against the Soviets.[4] However, soon after the Russian withdrawal from Kabul and its collapse, the Afghan refugees and their host Pakistan were helplessly abandoned to settle this gargantuan issue at their own way. It was unmanageable for Islamabad to carry away the burden of decade-long proxy war amid the two super powers with its own muscles. Generally, it is held that the most appropriate and perhaps the durable solution strategy towards the refugees' issue is voluntary repatriation to their country of origin. However, the million dollar question is, to what extent the phenomenon of repatriation on voluntary basis is auspicious for all the major stakeholders, particularly in case of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Soon after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Kabul, the repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan started;[5] but, owing to the extremely volatile security situation in Afghanistan and the conflict of interests between Kabul and Islamabad, the repatriation campaign persisted as veering. In early 1990s and 2000s, several millions Afghan refugees repatriated to their native country; however, the perpetual political unrest and dearth of socioeconomic necessities proved as major obstacles in the reintegration and resettlement of returnees in Afghanistan. Consequently the Afghans have been repeatedly choosing the option to search their habitation on the Eastern side of the Durand Line and returned to Pakistan as recyclers.[6] On the other hand, Islamabad has been consistently asking for the permanent return of refugees, but its aspirations have been short of the desires due to various 'pull' and 'push' factors on both sides of the Durand-Line.[7] The decades- long succession of Afghans between returnees and recyclers has made the refugees and their host Pakistan to bear the endless encumbrances.

This study aims to analyse the inconclusive repatriation of Afghans from Pakistan in the past three decades along with the ever existed pull and push factors on both sides of the Durand-Line (the porous Pak-Afghan Border that is more than 2600 km stretched). The factors that either encouraged or enforced the Afghan people to repeatedly opt, the choices of either leaving their native country or leaving for their country. This refugee

[4] Schoch, Rudiger. "Afghan refugees in Pakistan during the 1980s: cold war politics and registration practice. UNHCR; research paper No. 157. 2008 [cited 2009 Jul 31]."
[5] Ghufran, Nasreen. "Afghan refugees in Pakistan current situation and future scenario." *Policy perspectives* (2006): 83-104.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ames, Todd Trowbridge. "Factors affecting the repatriation of the Afghan refugees." (1992).

– recycler Ping-Pong by the Afghans during the past four decades has been the reflection of restlessness in Afghanistan and resentment of Pakistan. Theoretical outline of the study is related to the 1951 UN Convention[8], the 1967 Protocol[9] and the UNHCR's charter of Refugees. The data has been collected from both the primary and secondary sources by adopting the qualitative and quantitative strategies simultaneously.

## Afghan Conflict triggered the Influx of Millions of Refugees' in Pakistan

The last quarter of the 20th century, yet again witnessed Afghanistan as turning out to be the 'battlefield' of the Cold War between the then two superpowers of the bipolar world system, the United States of America (USA) and the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). On the eve of the Christmas in 1979, in its tenacity for ascertaining a more proactive role in Afghanistan, Russia decided to take the desperate step of moving its armed forces into the traditional graveyards of the super powers – Afghanistan.[10] However, the Moscow's aspiration of instituting its full control over the entire land-mass of Afghanistan proved only a suicidal move for the world's largest country that disintegrated within just around a decade.

The deadly war between the Soviet troops and their puppet Kabul regime, on the one hand and the armed Afghan guerrillas who were equipped with the US supplied state of the art weapons, on the other hand, eventually proved as a climax to the culmination of the cold war between the two super powers. The *Afghan Mujahidin*, politically and economically backed by the US, Pakistan, Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), not only ousted the Soviet troops from their soil but also destabilized the Soviet Union so desperately that the world's largest country failed to maintain its territorial integrity. On the other hand, the conflict not only devastated an already underprivileged Afghanistan, but also depopulated the country as a result of mass evacuation to the neighboring countries, mainly

[8] Weis, Paul, and Cambridge University. Research Centre for International Law. *The refugee convention, 1951*. Vol. 7. Cambridge University Press, 1995.

[9] Blay, Samuel KN, and B. Martin Tsamenyi. "Reservations and Declarations under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees." *International Journal of Refugee Law* 2, no. 4 (1990): 527-561.

[10] Kühn, Florian P. "Afghanistan and the 'Graveyard of Empires': Blumenberg, under-complex Analogy and Basic Myths in international Politics." In *Myth and narrative in international politics.* pp. 147-172. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2016.

Pakistan and Iran. Ultimately more than three and half million Afghan refugees escaped into Pakistan and around two million fled to Iran.[11]

On the resumption of presidential office in 1985, certainly the most domineering obstacle for Mikhail Gorbachev, the then Russian President, was the stinging affairs of Soviet forces in Afghanistan.[12] Therefore, in 1988, the domestic, regional and global pressures enforced Moscow to take a tougher decision of withdrawing the Russian troops from Kabul to protect them from further devastations.[13] However, the Russian withdrawal did not end the unrest in Afghanistan and another succession of lethal clashes continued in the country between the vain Communist regime of Kabul and the opposition until the collapse of Afghan President Najibullah in April 1992.[14] Still peace and stability could not triumph in the country due to another wave of clashes amid the sloppily allied *Mujahidin* groups for maximizing their control over various territories and institutions as bounty of war against the Soviets. In spite of the establishment of a coalition interim government in Kabul, central political authority was pathetic and almost all the key areas of Afghanistan leaped into further chaos and political as well as economic destabilization.[15]

In late 1994, the *Taliban* (A religious extremist force in Afghanistan emerged under Mullah Omer from Kandahar who had the ambitious agenda of liberating the country from the clutches of various embroiled *Mujahidin* groups. The Taliban ruled over majority of Afghanistan till they were toppled by the US led ISAF in post-9/11 war of terror campaign in 2001) on the political theater of Afghanistan. Though the Taliban succeeded in capturing majority of the areas of Afghanistan; however, because of their revolutionary and radical rule as well as inability in the modern international political issues, most of the global players turned against this regime.[16] The Taliban also bitterly failed in addressing majority of the genuine apprehensions of the rest of the world, mainly for hosting and supporting the

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[11] Margesson, Rhoda. "Afghan refugees: Current status and future prospects." LIBRARY OF CONGRESS WASHINGTON DC CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE, 2007.

[12] Simes, Dimitri K. "Gorbachev: A new foreign policy?." *Foreign Affairs* 65, no. 3 (1986): 477-500.

[13] Zemtsova, Natalia. "Mikhail Gorbachev and His Role in the Peaceful Solution of the Cold War." (2011).

[14] Katz, Mark. "Lessons of the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan." *Middle East Policy Council (March 9, 2011), http://www. mepc. org/articles-commentary/commentary/lessons-sovietwithdrawal-afghanistan (accessed September 18, 2012)."Will the Taliban Rise Again* (2011).

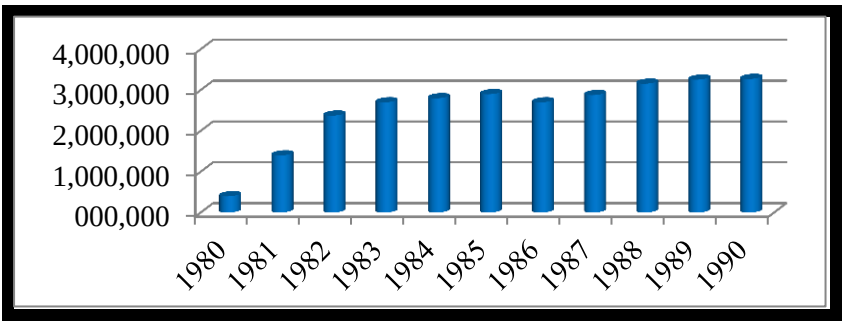
[15] Ibid.

[16] Auerswald, David P., and Stephen M. Saideman. *NATO in Afghanistan: fighting together, fighting alone*. Princeton University Press, 2014.

Al-Qaida operatives and its chief, Osama bin Laden, the alleged mastermind of September, 11 terrorist attacks on the US.[17] Eventually, the American launched 'Global War on Terror' on Afghanistan and the Taliban regime in Kabul collapsed within just a few weeks.[18] However, all these developments could not choke the miseries and encumbrances of Afghan people within and outside the country nor that of the Afghan refugees' largest hosting state, Pakistan.

One of the most distressing features of the Afghan conflicts in the past several decades has been the enormous evacuation of refugees to the neighboring countries especially, Pakistan. Even several weeks prior to the Soviet intrusion in Afghanistan, shortly after the 1978 coup by Nur Muhammad Tarakai the situation in Kabul was so startling that more than 200,000 Afghans had migrated to Pakistan.[19] These numbers of the refugees were further augmented by the incursion of Soviet troops in Kabul. During the early 1980s on average about 90,000 a month Afghans entered into Pakistan and prior to the mid-1980s, the number of refugees in Pakistan were well above the figures of three million.[20]

**Table 1: Yearly Population Chart of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan (1980-1990)[21]**




However, in April 1988 the major players involved in the Afghan conflict; the US, the USSR, Pakistan and Afghanistan signed the Geneva Accords.[22]

[17] Schweitzer, Yoram, and Sari Goldstein Ferber. *Al-Qaeda and the internationalization of suicide terrorism*. Tel Aviv University, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2005.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Braithwaite, Rodric. "The Russians in Afghanistan." *Asian Affairs* 42, no. 2 (2011): 213-229.
[20] World Bank. "The impacts of refugees on neighboring countries: A development challenge." (2010).
[21] Yearly Population of Afghans in Pakistan (UNHCR Reports, 1980 ~1990)
[22] Noorani, Zain. "The Geneva Accords and Afghanistan." *Pakistan Horizon* 41, No. 3 (1988): 50-69.

Eventually the Soviet troops pulled out from Afghanistan in February 1989 and Pakistan anticipated an enormous return of the Afghan refugees from the country, but the passive response from the international community, lack of political will from Islamabad, the protracted stay of Najibullah's regime in Kabul and the unpredictable security circumstances in Afghanistan collectively marred the aspirations of Pakistan regarding the repatriation of Afghan refugees from its soil. However, in 1992 the formation of Afghan Interim Islamic Government (AIIG) and the encashment program for the Afghan refugees in *'Operation Salam'* [23] (an operation launched by the UNHCR to provide country-wide rehabilitation assistance, with particular emphasis on the 14 provinces from which a third or more of the population had become refugees. Since some parts of the country were still affected by combat, it was envisaged that the work would proceed initially in so-called "zones of tranquility) invigorated the repatriation. However, the *Operation Salam* initiated repatriation process was spoiled due to the shortage of funds, the fragmentation of AIIG and lastly, the emergence of the Taliban.[24]

## Repatriation in the Post-Soviet Withdrawal Era

Ever since the Soviet incursion in Afghanistan, Pakistan has been patently demanding the repatriation of Afghan refugees at the earliest. In April 1992, the long-awaited stepping down of Dr Najibullah and the transfer of power to the coalition government of *Mujahidin;* ensued a massive repatriation program.[25] This repatriation was also requested and resulted due to the presence of interim setup in power, which had to pull the refugees back home to mark the confidence of various stakeholders within and outside Afghanistan. Islamabad celebrated its triumph over the Soviet's withdrawal and the annexation of AIIG in Kabul; the Afghans cherished the ouster of Dr Najib from the Afghan Presidency and the assumption of *Mujahidin* government as a political victory over the Russian forces and its communist agenda.

The Afghan refugees in Pakistan were enthusiastic for their timely repatriation and the new regime in Kabul also had the aspiration that they must return back to their native country. For most of the refugees were stout supporters and allies of the *Mujahidin* during the struggle against Soviet forces. In April 1992, there were around three million registered and another half a million un-registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the UNHCR

[23] Nasreen Ghufran, "The politics of repatriation: A case of afghan refugee repatriation from Pakistan 1989-2003." PhD diss., University of Peshawar, 2004.
[24] Formoli, Tareq A. "Impacts of the Afghan-Soviet War on Afghanistan's Environment: Short Communications & Reports." *Environmental Conservation* 22, no. 1 (1995): 66-69.
[25] Maley, William. "The Interregnum of Najibullah, 1989–1992." In *The Afghanistan Wars*, pp. 168-193. Palgrave, London, 2002.

was ready to assist the returnees.[26] On the other hand, Islamabad was more anxious about the repatriation of registered refugees than the unregistered, as somehow they themselves were looking after their issues and the later were supposedly putting lesser encumbrances on their host, Pakistan. However, the strategy of repatriating huge numbers of Afghans also opened the new debate for assuming that the government of Pakistan and the international community had unfettered themselves from the responsibility of providing assistance to the newly arrived unregistered refugees in Pakistan.[27]

## The 1992 Encashment Program as a Component of the Operation Salaam

According to this encashment program a special scheme of repatriation was announced for those Afghans in Pakistan who possessed the valid registration documents and they were willing for returning to Afghanistan. The refugees were offered US Dollar 100 cash grant as traveling expenses in addition to 300 Kilograms of wheat as food support, but for this assistance they had to cancel their passbooks, a registration document.[28] The assistance package was offered to Afghan refugees in Pakistan with a permission to decide freely if and when to return to their native country. Simultaneously, the United Nations launched '*Operation Salam'* in Afghanistan to address the challenges of reintegration and resettlement. The UN had also requested huge funds from the world community to manage the basic necessities for millions of helpless returnees and the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan.[29] By early 1992, the refugees' agency, the UNHCR had established numerous encashment centers; eventually, by summer up to 100,000 Afghans were leaving for Afghanistan on weekly basis and by the end of the year around 1.3 million Afghan refugees had already benefited from the repatriation assistance package.[30]

Though, the UNHCR had characterised the 1992 repatriation plan as the biggest and fastest program ever assisted by the international refugee agency in its history,[31] yet several weaknesses were identified in this repatriation program. Right from its onslaught the *`Operation Salam'* ran

[26] Dr Fayyaz, "Pakistan Counter-terrorism (CT)-Afghan Refugee Question." *South Asian Studies* 33, No. 2 (2020).
[27] Ruiz, Hiram. "Repatriation: Tackling Protection and Assistance Concerns.'." *World Refugee Survey* 1993 (1993): 20-29.
[28] Nasreen Ghufran, 2004
[29] Ibid.
[30] Hiram Ruiz, (1993): 20-29.
[31] Ruiz, Hiram A., Bill Frelick, and Margaret Emery. *Pakistan: Afghan refugees shunned and scorned*. Immigration and Refugee Services of America, (2001): p, 18.

into financial and logistic quandaries for the trivial interests shown to it from Washington and the rest of the actors of the international community; hence the encashment program had to be terminated primarily because of the deficiency of funds.[32] Later on, this mega operation allegedly proved as a more "de-registration," exercise of the refugees than the repatriation plan; in addition to a large number of uncertainties on the part of the UNHCR itself.[33]

On the other hand, there was no surety about those who cancelled their passbooks and they had actually returned to Afghanistan, while a large number of refugees opted to shift from the refugees' camps to the major urban centers of their host, Pakistan. These assisted Afghans established new businesses on the remunerations they had already received through the assistance package. Owing to a very huge number of returnees, the UNHCR and the Pakistani officials could not thoroughly screen out the crossing points at the Pak-Afghan border to ascertain the actual statistics of the repatriation. Majority of the repatriated Afghans basically came from the Afghan districts that are closer to the Durand Line and they had to overcome tiniest hurdles in crossing over back to Pakistan as recyclers, as and when they faced grave situation in their country of origin. Pakistan also expressed its anxieties over the puerile attitude of the world especially the West, predominantly after a strident drop in financial assistance from the donors for the repatriating Afghan refugees. In early 1990s as a result of the Pressler Amendment[34] not only the US assistance to Pakistan was ceased by the Bush senior administration but Islamabad had to face military and economic sanctions.[35]

## The Repatriation Trends in the Taliban Era

The ascendance of Taliban as a resilient force in Afghanistan deeply convoluted the sociopolitical construction of the country. By the end of 1996, the Taliban had established their sturdy control upon the major cities of Afghanistan. At the same time in its resolve to have benign trade routes with Central Asian States through Afghanistan, Pakistan assumed that the Taliban regime would prove comparatively advantageous for Islamabad's interests in the region. On the other hand, ever since decades, for the first time anti-Indian actor seized the helms of affairs in Kabul and above all, the

[32] Nasreen Ghufran, 2004

[33] Turton, David, and Peter Richard Valentine Marsden. *Taking refugees for a ride?: the politics of refugee return to Afghanistan*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), 2002.

[34] Mahmood, Tehmina. "Pressler Amendment and Pakistan's security concerns." *Pakistan Horizon* 47, no. 4 (1994): 97-107.

[35] Nasreen Ghufran, 2004

phenomena of the so called "*Strategic Depth*" (a concept in which Pakistan aimed to use Afghanistan as an instrument of strategic security in ongoing tensions with India by attempting to control Afghanistan as a pawn for its own political purposes) seemed fairly attainable.[36] Though some improvement in the overall stability of Afghanistan was evident during the Taliban control, yet owing to persistent pugnaciousness in the country merely 0.27 million Afghan refugees returned back to their country from Pakistan during 1995-96.[37]

The UNHCR and the World Food Program (WFP) sacked their food assistance program for most of the refugees residing in camps during the Taliban era, at the same time Pakistan allegedly nodded this move; since all the three players expected least dependency of Afghans upon them and the refugees would eventually rushed for their timely repatriation.[38] Nevertheless, the hopes of the three refugees' assisting players, particularly that of Islamabad, were severely shattered as majority of refugees preferred to migrate into the major cities of Pakistan for searching better employments and businesses that further pressurized the country's overall urban job market and also exaggerated the resentment of the hosting population against the presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.[39] Despite additional sufferings and hardships in Pakistan no surged was seen in the pace of refugees' repatriation to Afghanistan. As a result of bloody fighting between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance and one of the worst droughts in the history of Afghanistan, in the year 2000 another influx of around 172,000 refugees into Pakistan was monitored; while during this year the number of repatriated Afghans could touch the figure of 77,000 only.[40]

The jubilation of returnees got bitterly faded, for they had to confront additional challenges during their resettlement in Afghanistan. The absence of a united central regime, accepted and respected by majority of the Afghan people was perhaps one of the hardest challenges. Though the war against Communist regime in Afghanistan and the subsequent civil war in the country had concluded, but a new battle of dominating Kabul still continued. The protracted conflict, heavy bombings and deadly shelling of rockets and mortars on the public and private properties had turned the country into ashes, which further horrified the refugees in their motherland. Eventually, the availability of more promising situation in Pakistan and the presence of almost dysfunctional border management around 2600 kms stretched border, the Durand Line, attracted back the refugees as recyclers

[36] Rashid, A., 1999. The Taliban: exporting extremism. *Foreign Affairs*, pp.22-35.
[37] UNHCR. "Populations of Concern to UNHCR: A Statistical Overview." (1996).
[38] Nasreen Ghufran, 2004
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

into Pakistan. As a whole, the repatriation program launched in 1992 ostensibly displayed some comprehensive plans for managing the return of millions of Afghans and the engineers of the sketch unhesitatingly proclaimed it as a success story, but the perpetual unrest and lasting instability in Afghanistan are held responsible for spoiling the whole efforts instead of offering some kind of relief to miseries of the returnees.[41]

During the last months of the year 2000, responding to the new influxes of Afghans as well as the icy attitude of the world community, Islamabad announced to cordon off its Afghan border.[42] However, due to the highly porous nature of the Pak-Afghan border, historically its closure had hardly ever been fully effective, except the recent measures taken by Pakistan to fence the border. Pakistani officials stringently demanded the current Afghan passport and valid Pakistani visa from the Afghans at the time of their entry to Pakistan. Simultaneously, the authorities started insisting that the Afghan refugees found in the urban centers had to present these valid travel documents; otherwise they would face enforced deportation. This stringent stance from Islamabad towards the Afghan refugees continued till the onslaught of US lead military action in Afghanistan by October 2001, in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist's attacks in the United States. Hence, once again Pakistan had to suffer from new influxes of Afghan refugees with greater numbers and additional challenges. During the past few decades the Afghans either left their homeland for taking refuge or left for their motherland with a label of returnees for several times, predominantly because of the presence of multiple attraction and repulsion features on both sides of the Durand-Line.[43]

Subsequently, during the Taliban era the overall statistics of the recyclers to Pakistan were much higher as compared to those refugees who opted to voluntarily repatriate to Afghanistan. The imbalance was further deteriorated by the post-9/11 US lead global war on terror campaign in Afghanistan and eventually another huge influx of around 1.5 million Afghan refugees to Pakistan was ensued.[44]

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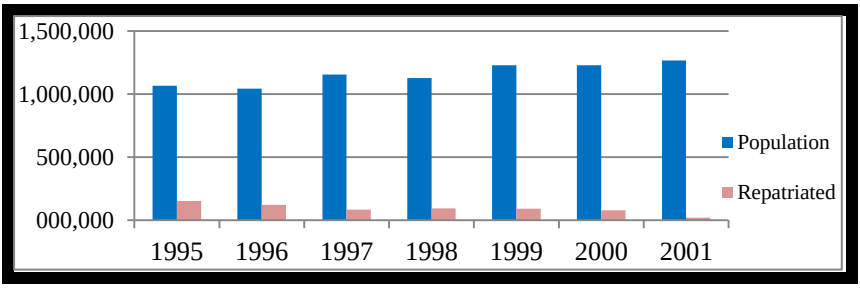
[41] Nurani, J., A. Saboor, M. Kamran, Z. Saify, A. Ibrahimi, A. Shikaib, and Y. Torabi. "Integration of returnees in the Afghan labor market." (2006).

[42] Nasreen Ghufran, 2004

[43] Rashid, Umar. "UNHCR in Pakistan: Analyzing the Global Governance Regime-Repatriation of Afghan Refugees from Pakistan." *LUMS LJ* 6 (2019): 31.

[44] Ahmad, Waseem. "The Fate of Durable Solutions in Protracted Refugee Situations: The Odyssey of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan." *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 15, no. 3 (2017).

**Table 2: Yearly Population of Afghan Refugees and Returnees in Pakistan (1995-2001)**[45]




## Repatriation of Afghan Refugees in the Post 9/11 Era

At the dawn of the 21st century, the 9/11 incident can be marked as one of the most crucial incidents of the contemporary international politics. Similarly, the year 2002 could be readily called a landmark period in the modern history of Afghanistan. Apart from many other crucial developments, this year almost 1.5 million Afghans chose to voluntarily repatriate to their native country from Pakistan hoping extraordinary prospects of large scale rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in Afghanistan. The government of Pakistan, the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MORR) and the UNHCR collectively endeavored to facilitate the voluntary return of millions of refugees to Afghanistan. Even if, the repatriation plan was fabricated to have been exercised purely on humanitarian grounds, still it was not crafted short of achieving political objectives of numerous global actors. A number of political features may also have played vibrant role in influencing the refugees for repatriating to Afghanistan from Pakistan and from all over the world in such huge numbers. It is pertinent to mention that these measures were taken without having scrupulously analyzed the endless predicaments in the decades-long war trodden, Afghanistan.

The engrossment of the sole superpower in the unipolar system that was backed by almost the whole world together with international governmental and non- governmental organizations (IOs and NGOs) offered the canvas in Afghanistan as if opened to paint it, according to the will and wish of Washington. The refugees in Pakistan passionately returned to Afghanistan despite tenacious security issues and delicate infrastructure in majority of the areas in Afghanistan. In this inclusive repatriation drive Pakistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR collectively assisted up to around 1.8

[45] Yearly Population of Afghans and Returnees (UNHCR, 1995 ~ 2001)

million refugees in returning back to their homeland; and it was ascribed as the world's biggest repatriation exercised in the past thirty years.[46] On the other hand, the huge presence of a number of key actors from all over the world in Kabul had also raised a sense of confidence in the socioeconomic strength and enhanced security situation of Afghanistan. It can be stated that the start of the 2002 repatriation was exceedingly enormous in various aspects. It was primarily because of a wide-ranging participation of numerous international as well as regional actors. At the end of the day, these developments were also an indication of confidence from the Afghans on the newly instated regime in Kabul and above all a matter of even greater credibility for the UNHCR itself.

In early 2002 the declaration of UNHCR regarding the repatriation of almost 0.8 million refugees seemed unfeasible to some of the observers.[47] Nevertheless, as soon as the agency operated its repatriation centers in various cities of Pakistan, hundreds of thousands of refugees rushed for the registration to avail the UNHCR assisted repatriation program. In May and June 2002, on daily basis up to 10,000 applications were being submitted to the repatriation centers and the already set target exceeded in only a short span of about fifteen weeks of the announcement.[48] For the first time, the Iris Technology was launched by the UNHCR to check the Afghan recyclers from getting unlawful repatriation assistance at the Quetta and Peshawar Voluntary Repatriation Centers (VRCs).[49] Every Afghan above the age of 16 years, looking for assisted repatriation plan had to come across an Iris scanning process that was transformed into a kind of digital code in recorded database, maintained in respect of the Afghan refugees.[50]

## The Role of 'Pull and Push' Factors amid Returnees and Recyclers

The swing of returnees and recyclers has been the outcome of some major 'Pull and Push' factors on either sides of the Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Although, Islamabad never accredited to the refugees related international conventions, yet it has been upholding her pledges of the Geneva Accords, signed in 1988. The accord ascertained that

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[46] Peter Kessler. Afghanistan Humanitarian Update No. 67. *UNHCR.* 2003, January 03. Retrieved @ https://www.unhcr.org/news/updates/2003/1/3e15b2184/afghanistan-humanitarian-update-67.html

[47] Nasreen Ghufran, 2004.

[48] Ibid. Peter Kessler, 2003

[49] Ibid.

[50] Jacobsen, Katja Lindskov. "Experimentation in humanitarian locations: UNHCR and biometric registration of Afghan refugees." *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 2 (2015): 144-164.

the repatriation of Afghans refugees from Pakistan would be predominantly voluntary, and the Afghans, hardly ever possessing the lawful traveling documents, have been unrestrainedly benefiting from the phenomena of voluntariness and therefore several thousand people have been crossing the Pak-Afghan border on daily basis with various pretexts.[51]

Pakistan has patiently lifted the encumbrance of millions of Afghans for decades. However, Islamabad has also been expressing its resentment that owing to the distressing socio-economic situation of the country, many a times it has to harden its policy towards Afghan refugees/recyclers who have allegedly added to the escalation of social crimes, drugs and human trafficking, kidnapping for ransom and even the cases of prostitution in the country.[52] Being perplexed by their uncertain future in exile, the Afghans in 2002 decided to return to their native country well in time, with an idea, the sooner the better. In addition, the US launched global 'War on Terror' (WoT) campaign knocked down the Taliban. As an interim measure a new political regime headed by Hamid Karzai was constituted in Kabul that helped in fascinating the refugees to go back to Afghanistan.

On the other hand, the presence of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the key areas of Afghanistan also captivated the refugees who were anticipating glorious future in Afghanistan. In a personal interview with Mr. Zahir Shah, an official in Afghan refugees' camp in Pakistan stated that the refugees rushed for the repatriation with higher degree of expectations in their homeland. The Bonn Accords, accredited in 2001, also significantly helped in assuring the internal and external stakeholders including the refugees in Pakistan to foresee a brighter future of the Afghan people.[53] Finally, the arrangement and execution of the Afghan *Loya Jirga* (*A special type of Jirga, grand meeting or legal assembly, mainly organized for choosing a new head of state in case of sudden death, adopting a new constitution, or to settle national or regional issues such as war*) in 2002, which was also attended by the ex-King Zahir Shah (*the son of Muhammad Nader Shah, Zahir Shah (1914-2007) remained the king of Afghanistan from 1933 to 1973, who delivered an era of stable government to his country*); enticed the Afghans from all over the world to come back to Afghanistan and take part in the restructuring and rebuilding of their native country.[54]

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[51] Ibrahim Shinwari. Thousands of Afghans cross Torkham after relaxation in travel rules. Dawn. April 8, 2020. Retrieved @ https://www.dawn.com/news/1547299

[52] UNHCR. "Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection." (1996).

[53] Fields, Mark, and Ramsha Ahmed. "A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference and application to the road ahead in Afghanistan." (2011).

[54] Ibid

At the same time, the announcement of billions of dollars assistance, pledged by various donors from all over the world was also an element of highly mesmerizing substance for the investors along with the refugees, who were anticipating wide ranging development and rebuilding program in Afghanistan. The new administration in Kabul also urged the Afghans to come back and take part in rejuvenation of their country also enthralled the Afghans in huge numbers to repatriate. Hence, the repatriation started with highly encouraging statistics; however, numerous inadequacies were identified by various analysts simultaneously. The lack of appropriate remedial actions regarding the hurdles, not only slanted the mega repatriation plan rather pushed it to a more or less failure.[55]

Majority of the key players; Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States were purportedly trying to manipulate the state of affairs in their own favor. Pakistan wanted to gain the favour of global community to assist the Afghan refugees in their return; the interim Kabul regime needed to draw the Afghans worldover to establish its internal and external credibility; while Washington aimed to validated its claim of liberating the Afghan people from the dogmatic Taliban regime through the so called 'Operation Enduring Freedom' (*the OEF was the official name used by the US government for Global WoT. On 7 October 2001, in response to the 9/11 attacks, President Bush announced that airstrikes targeting Al-Qaeda and the Taliban had begun in Afghanistan. The OEF primarily referred to the War in Afghanistan but it was also affiliated with counterterrorism operations in other countries*) in Afghanistan.[56]

## Defying Challenges to Repatriated Refugees in Afghanistan

Undoubtedly, the repatriation process of 2002 started promptly, demonstrating some promising emblems in the beginning. However, later on the exercise of coming back home of more than two million Afghan refugees seemed to be relatively premature and they had to face stark challenges in their native country. Even the UNHCR's officials had to admit the shortcomings in the repatriation process as Rudd Lubbers, the then Commissioner of the agency stated that Afghanistan had been too decent on repatriation; however, there were number of issues related to security and other associated matters with sufficient room for improvement."[57]

The power vacuum during the past few decades resulted into physical and economic uncertainty, chaotic law and order situation, crimes,

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[55] Nasreen Ghufran, 2004

[56] Lewis, Adrian R. *The American culture of war: A history of US military force from World War II to Operation Enduring Freedom*. Routledge, 2014.

[57] 8 UNHCR, "Lubbers Happy with Returns, but Worried About Reintegration," News Stories, August 28, 2002

racism and sectarian violence throughout Afghanistan. Similarly, the country has also been facing numerous distressing challenges like; the growing number of human rights abuses, ever growing cases of mistreatment of women, exploitation of children, disputes on properties and possessions, lodging and shelter scarcities, dearth of food and water facilities, nonexistence of health care as well as educational provisions, deficiency of jobs and economic undertakings.[58] At the same time, unrelenting bombings and inexorable shelling by the NATO forces also horribly threatened the returnees in Afghanistan who opted to recycle back to Pakistan too shortly but massively.[59]

The voluntary repatriation of 2002 was huge but also subject to sever accusations from various political analysts for its discrepancies and premature accomplishment. The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), a Kabul based non-governmental organization, also came up with a severe criticism over an almost thoughtless and mega repatriation exercise of almost two million refugees to the decades long war-ridden Afghanistan, which was unable to provide basic facilities of human life and categorically labeled the mass repatriation as premature, rushed and even misguided.[60] The director of The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Andrew Wilder also pointed out that the mistakes were marked by the world community and the Kabul administration in cheering such a huge number of refugees to return without ensuring extensive arrangement prior to the arrival of refugees enormously.[61]

On the one hand, the Hamid Karzai's regime seemingly had neither the appropriate capacity nor a suitable mandate to control the overall situation in the country. At the same time, the ISAF continued its lethal bombing operations also engendered a sense of awful insecurity in the Afghans, who as usual had the readily available option of crossing the border and finding refuge in the neighboring Pakistan. During the succeeding years, the number of returnees from Pakistan declined; rather those of the recyclers surged significantly. These returnees to Pakistan became more susceptible than they were in the past, since they had lost their previous households, businesses, employments and even their chums in the country.

Deen Muhammad, an Afghan residing in the refugee camp in Pakistan during a personal conversation with the researcher drew a dismal picture of the situation by stating that the collapse of Taliban and the

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[58] Nasreen Ghufran, 2004
[59] Ibid.
[60] Wilder, Andrew R. *Cops or Robbers?: The Struggle to Reform the Afghan National Police*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007
[61] Ibid.

resumption of Karzai regime in Kabul attracted the refugees in Pakistan who were highly fervent to return their native country.[62] The Afghans sold all their households and started a mystifying journey to Afghanistan but found nothing what they had anticipated in their country. According to interviewee, the repatriated Afghans had no better choice other than recycling back to Pakistan, the second home of the Afghans.[63]

## Provision of the Legal Framework for Afghan refugees in Pakistan

Pakistan's policy towards the Afghan refugees has mostly been pigeonholed as being short of some appropriate legal coverage. Nevertheless, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UNHCR reached an agreement in October 2002, which for the first time provided the legal framework and contrivance for the repatriation of refugees, continued since last three decades.[64] The covenant basically consisted of a three year plan (2003-2005), demonstrating that the United Nations High Commission for Refugees was bound to carry on its assistance in gradual, organized and voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan.[65] The accord aimed to address the voluntary repatriation of the existing Afghan refugees only, whose figures persistently increased because of the meager economic and security conditions in Afghanistan.

However, no clarification was made by the stakeholders for the developments arising after three years of the initial covenant. The on ground circumstances in Afghanistan were not properly evaluated and the entire repatriation strategy of the refugees was hastily decided. This tripartite covenant did not express the ultimate solution to the decades-long issue, but it was the foundation towards the resolution strategy towards this grave challenge. Neither the miseries of Afghan refugees nor the genuine concerns of the host, Pakistan, were thoroughly assessed, particularly in case of the fiasco of the agreement.

## The Repatriation Trends in the Post 2002 Era

Subsequent to the 2002 enormous program, the ensuing chapter of repatriation of Afghan refugees was comparatively less promising. Hypothetically, the refugees stayed back in their host country were economically better placed, and majority of the left-over Afghans rejoiced

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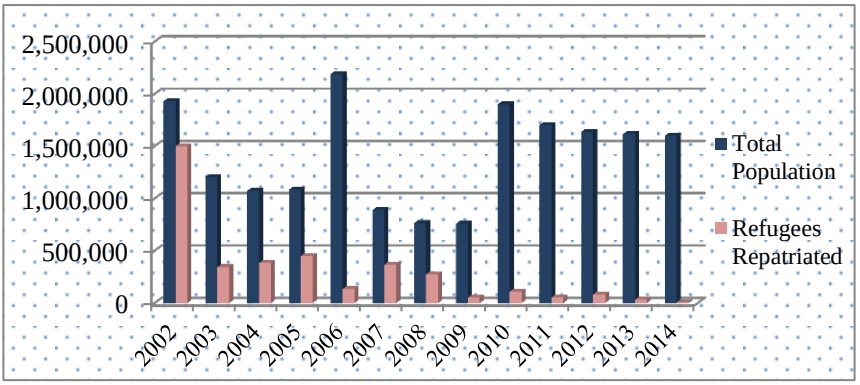
[62] Deen Muhammad, an Afghan residing at the refugee camp in the Haripur District of Pakistan; narrated the situation in Personal Interview with the researcher, (2015).
[63] Ibid.
[64] Nasreen Ghufran. "Afghan refugees in Pakistan current situation and future scenario." *Policy perspectives* (2006): 83-104.
[65] ibid

the luxury of superior urban facilities in various metropolitan cities of Pakistan. During the year 2003, up to only around 0.343 million Afghan refugees repatriated to Afghanistan from Pakistan and these figures is only about 10 per cent of the previous year.[66] The newly arising various significant developments such as the 2003 Tripartite Treaty, the 2003 assassination attempts against the Pakistani President, General Pervez Musharraf,[67] the 2004 stringent military operations conducted by Pakistani Army in South Waziristan,[68] the closure of refugee camps especially in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in 2005;[69] obviously worked as the push factors for the Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

**Table 3:Ratio of Afghan Refugees' Population and Repatriation Data[70]**



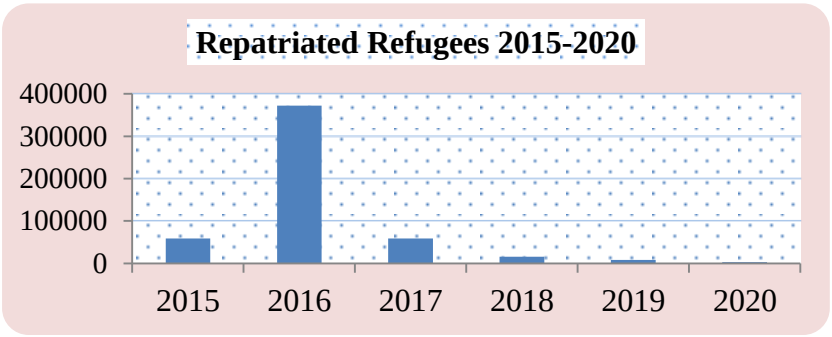

Consequently, since 2002 till the end of 2006, the overall figures of repatriated Afghans from Pakistan crossed three millions.[71] Undoubtedly, this repatriation course displayed highly fascinating statistics in its early month, but in every passing year, these figures plunged downward. According to UNHCR, in 2002 almost 90 percent of the standing Afghan populace in Pakistan repatriated to the country of their origin; however, by 2014 the proportion of repatriated Afghans as compared to the existing

[66] UNHCR, 2003 country operations profile- Pakistan, http://www.unhcr.org.
[67] Salman Masood. PAKISTANI LEADER ESCAPES ATTEMPT AT ASSASSINATION. *The New York Times. 2003 December, 26.*
[68] Chandran, Suba. *Military Operations in South Waziristan: Issues and Implications*. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies., 2004.
[69] Suba Chandran. *Military Operations in South Waziristan: Issues and Implications*. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies., 2004.
[70] Afghan Refugees' Population and Repatriation Data: UNHCR (2002~2014)
[71] UNHCR Reports, 2003~2006 country operations profile- Pakistan, http://www.unhcr.org.

population of refugees in Pakistan plunged down to only around 0.6 percent, the all-time lowest figures of the past ever since the inception of repatriation in early 1990s.[72]

However, the December 16, 2014 incident of Army Public School (APS) Peshawar and the highly stringent response from the civil and military establishment, especially that the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa transformed the dynamics of security scenario and ultimately the state of affairs for the Afghan refugees in Pakistan.[73] However, in 2015 only about 58,000 Afghan refugees repatriated from Pakistan; but in 2016 these figures rose up to around 0.373 million, demonstrating the highest figures ever in the past one and half decades, but since then the numbers have dropped to only a few thousand in the past two years.[74] Hence, during the first one and half decades of the 21st century, as a whole around four million registered Afghan refugees availed the assisted repatriation programme from Pakistan to Afghanistan;[75] but in the next half decade these figures are not more than just half a million.[76]

**Table 4: The Afghan Refugees Repatriation Data 2015-2020**[77]




[72] UNHCR Reports, 2002~2014 country operations profile- Pakistan, http://www.unhcr.org.
[73] KAROCK, Ulrich. "The Peshawar Army Public School Attack: From Nightmare to Greater Darkness?." *Directorate-General For External Policies-Policy Department* 18.
[74] Trends, UNHCR Global. "United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2016." (2016). Accessed @http://www.unhcr.org/statistics.
[75] UNHCR Reports, 2002 ~ 2014 country operations profile- Pakistan, http://www.unhcr.org.
[76] Report, UNHCR Global. "United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2020." (2020). Accessed @http://www.unhcr.org/statistics.
[77] UNHCR Global Report, 2020. Accessed@ http://www.unhcr.org.

## Roadmap to the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees

Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and the UNHCR, in 2011, reached a multi-year solutions strategy for Afghan refugees (SSAR) and their voluntary repatriation, with cross border coordination in the concerned states.[78] In 2012, a similar kind of meeting was arranged in Geneva to coordinate the execution of the new SSAR. The meeting was attended by numerous diplomats, major donors, IOs and aid reputable agencies to certify the new approach and seek assistance in managing the required financial support, necessary for the voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration of refugees in the host countries. As a result of such extraordinary meetings in 2012 Islamabad extended the stay of Afghans in Pakistan until June next year.[79] Since then this non-terminating course of extensions in refugees stay in Pakistan has been extended repeatedly.

In 2013, Islamabad sanctioned its National Policy on Afghan refugees, perhaps the first time, focusing on effective execution of SSAR and to support Kabul in expanding social, educational as well as professional prospects for the Afghan refugees.[80] Islamabad also expressed its apprehension upon the lack of ability of Kabul in taking appropriate measures for the resettlement of repatriated refugees in Afghanistan. However, Islamabad extended the validity of refugees' Proof of Registration (PoR) cards and further extended the deadline for their repatriation till December 2015.[81]

The introduction of tighter security and immigration arrangements across the Pak-Afghan border, the stiffer demand of Islamabad for legal traveling document from the Afghans to arrive into Pakistan, the UNHCR's expansion of the voluntary repatriation endowment from US$200 to US$400 in 2016 considerably contributed in increasing the number of returnees from Pakistan.[82] The Afghan MORR also launched a campaign in Pakistan that encouraged the refugees to return home by raising the slogan *Khpal Watan, Gul Watan* [83](your motherland, your beautiful motherland) that also boosted the numbers of repatriating refugees to their home country. The wide-ranging arrangements, especially the strict operations launched by the security forces of Pakistan also supplemented the upsurge of repatriated

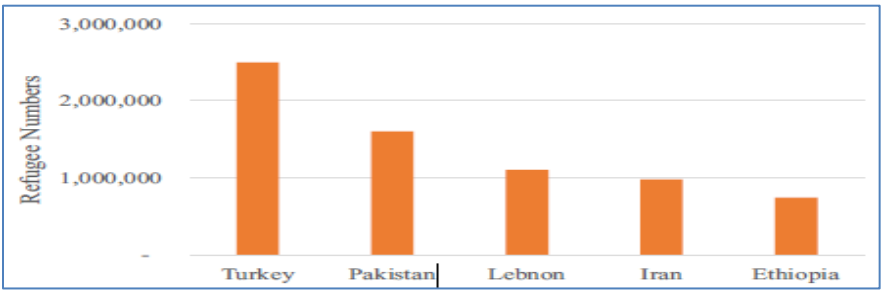
[78] UNHCR Report, 2012 country operations profile- Pakistan, http://www.unhcr.org.
[79] Ibid.
[80] UNHCR Reports, 2013 country operations profile- Pakistan, http://www.unhcr.org.
[81] Ibid.
[82] UNHCR, 2016.
[83] UNHCR, Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation Update: 10,225 Afghan Refugees Returned since January 2018. July, 2018. Accessed @ https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/65330.pdf

Afghans. However, the Pakistani authorities further extended the validity of POR cards held by the Afghan refugees until September, 2018.[84]

## The Overall Prospects and Challenges to the Repatriation of Afghan Refugees

Pakistan has never ratified the international refugees' conventions; still it holds the title of the second largest refugee hosting state in the world.[85] However, paradoxically, Islamabad could neither table a comprehensive and consistent policy for millions of Afghan refugees nor priorities their repatriation according to its national interests. In the beginning of Afghan conflict, Pakistan cheered the refugees without any international legal assurances; later on it felt weary of this liability.

**Table 5: World's Largest Refugee Hosting Countries**




The Durand Line, more than 2600 kilometer stretched, has remained one of the mostly loosely watched borders in the world. It consists of terrains that had multiple identified and unidentified crossing points from where this porous border has been easily breached by the Afghans as well as other miscreants, who would easily trigger destabilization on either side, particularly in Pakistan. The border between the two neighbors remained perhaps more muddled than any other official border in the world, as around 50,000 people used to cross it daily.[86]

However, in the past few years Pakistan has started to fence the Pak-Afghan border that has certainly improved the crossing activities across the Durand- line. On the other hand, the presence of millions of Afghans in Pakistan has been a perpetual threat as the terrorist attacks all over the

[84] Ibid
[85] UNHCR. (2017). Mid-year trend 2016. Geneva, Switzerland: (UNHCR), the UN Refugee Agency. Retrieved http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/58aa8f247/mid-year-trends-june-2016.html.
[86] Nasreen Ghufran, 2004.

country during the past several years allegedly had held their links with the cross border elements after appropriate investigations. The unrest in Baluchistan has also been reportedly fueled from Afghanistan. The authorities of Pakistan reiterate that the national interest of the country rigorously demands a comprehensive repatriation plan, backed by the UNHCR and the international community.

The masses and business community of Pakistan maintain that the Afghan refugees are an enormous economic liability on the country's overall job market; for statistics reveal that virtually every tenth Afghani citizen has been looked after by Islamabad since last four decades.[87] Majority of the business centers in Pakistan have a large number of *Bara Shops (shops for goods smuggled to Pakistan through Afghanistan)*, filled with illegally smuggled goods from all over the world via Afghanistan. According to the vice president of KPK Chamber of Commerce and Industries:

> *"Afghans run 10,000 of the estimated 20,000 shops in Peshawar; but since they are not registered residents, they are not subject to the same taxes as Pakistani shop-owners. … His department has been "urging" the federal government to repatriate Afghans so locals can continue to do their trade. He also alleged that refugees' demand for housing has pushed rents to unaffordable prices".*[88]

The refugees have been reportedly posturing grave socioeconomic and political complications in different parts of Pakistan. According to the Ministry of Information in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, about 80 percent of crimes have their links with the Afghan refugees.[89] The Pakhtunkhwa government has repeatedly demanded that the refugees holding POR cards are to be necessarily restricted to the Afghan refugees' camps and those without holding these cards should essentially be expelled to their native country.

The enormous presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan could also initiate incongruence in various political institutions of the country. The federal and provincial authorities have had stark differences on the repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan as being part of 'National

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[87] According to the Worldometer the population of Afghanistan is around 40 million. The presence of around 4 million Afghans in Pakistan refers to the fact that every 10th Afghan citizen is in Pakistan. Accessed@ https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/afghanistan-population/

[88] Roehrs, Christine. "The Refugee Dilemma: Afghans in Pakistan between expulsion and failing aid schemes." *Afghanistan Analysts Network* 9 (2015). Accessed @ https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/migration/the-refugee-dilemma-afghans-in-pakistan-between-expulsion-and-failing-aid-schemes/

[89] Ibid.

Action Plan' (NAP), Islamabad's anti-terrorist plan initiated after the 2016 APS incident during all parties meeting. The proclamation from the leader of Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), Mahmood Khan Achakzai, was provoking for many in the country, when he argued that the ill-treatment of Pashtuns and Afghan refugees in Pakistan was not acceptable anymore for his party; he also called the Afghans as brothers and further reiterated that it was up to them to decide about their residence in the host country and they will always be welcomed in Pakistan.[90]

On the other hand, the UNHCR has been giving the impression of mere lobbying for the refugees in Pakistan, in order to gain additional time for the refugees' stay on humanitarian basis; while to some of the analysts, the protracted stay of several million Afghans in Pakistan for decades is more a political than humanitarian issue.[91] Pakistan has always readily extended the refugees stay in the country during the past two decades, the UNHCR and Kabul could have done much more for the rehabilitation of returnees in Afghanistan. The UNHCR has been allegedly attempting premature and flawed strategies, confronting the shortage of funds, in the 1992 and 2002 repatriation plans.[92] The absence of durable reintegration plan in Afghanistan has been one of the drastic obstacles in the repatriation of Afghans. Ever since the inception of the Afghan conflict, Kabul could neither attract nor assure the Afghans lying as refugees in the neighboring countries, especially in Pakistan.

The returnees in Afghanistan always faced grave security challenges because of the continued unrest in the country in the past four decades. On the contrary, a large number of refugees in Pakistan are likewise frustrated due to trembling political and economic situation of Afghanistan. The repatriated Afghans also confronted the nonexistence of modern infrastructure, highly poor networks of roads and communication, pitiable irrigation and sanitation services, education and health opportunities, land disputes, war- lordship, unlawful taxes particularly in the nonurban areas of the country.[93]

Apparently Afghanistan has been following the strategy of buck-passing the responsibility on the other's shoulder or 'killing the time and

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[90] Ibid.

[91] Ghufran, Nasreen. "Afghans in Pakistan: A Protracted Refugee Situation'." *Policy Perspectives* (2008): 117-129.

[92] Turton, David, and Peter Richard Valentine Marsden. *Taking refugees for a ride?: the politics of refugee return to Afghanistan*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), 2002.

[93] Affleck, Rosa T., and Reed B. Freeman. "Challenges for engineering design, construction, and maintenance of infrastructure in Afghanistan." (2010). Accessed @ https://erdc-library.erdc.dren.mil/jspui/handle/11681/11815.

doing nothing'. It has hardly ever seriously owned its several million citizens living as refugees for decades. Though, Kabul is confronting serious challenges; however, when there is a will there is a way' and inspite of thorny features few of the encouraging emblems may also be found in Afghanistan. The ISAF and the US have completed their withdrawal and the Taliban have resumed power in Kabul; above all the regional actors are more interested and involved in resolving the issues in Afghanistan.

The Afghans have the opportunity of demonstrating their resilience to strengthen their country, and ultimately the refugees would also display their trust in Kabul. Consequently, Afghanistan would be capable of attracting the foreign investment and investors; least foreigners will hardly show their trust till its own people do so. The life of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is despondent as they could not find a permanent lodging in the past four decades neither in their country of origin nor refuge. On the other hand despite her economic and security challenges, Pakistan has always been trying its level best to extend greater assistance to Afghanistan and its refugees. However, this ample support might have fallen too trivial as compared to the very high expectations of Kabul, the Afghan political leadership as well as the international community.

## Conclusion

In the past four decades, Afghanistan continued to be the land of wars, warriors, weapons and woes for it became the theater of the great powers politics at least for two times. The Russian invasion on Kabul out-burst around four million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Initially, the host welcomed them but latter due to her own critical challenges, Islamabad started demanding the repatriation of the several millions Afghans to their native country. Certainly there have been two major repatriation drives in 1992 and 2002, but historically the porous nature of Pak-Afghan border could hardly ever control the recycling of the repatriated Afghans back to Pakistan. Confronting numerous economic, political, social and security challenges, Islamabad marks these Afghans as unavoidable burden on its socioeconomic fabric. However, the presence of a number of pull and push factors across the Durand Line have been the major restriction to the desire of Pakistan.

However, despite highly promising figures of repatriation in 1992 and 2002, the overall myth of repatriation seems to be a failure. The ground realities and associated statistics can clearly identify that the voluntary repatriation of millions of refugees from Pakistan to Afghanistan could only be a fantasy, but not a reality. However, keeping in view the ground realities this research work deems some of the recommendations.

Instead of accepting the enormous challenge of managing issue of several million refugees, right from the early days Islamabad ought to have entreated the international community for a comprehensive and feasible strategy with a time frame, including the challenging task of repatriation. Such measures would have been exceeding helpful in accepting and sharing this colossal responsibility that Pakistan has to handle almost single-handedly. This would not only maximize the prospects of easiness for the host but also facilitated the refugees to repatriate and re-establish their lives in their native country well in time. Pakistan ought to have worked out a comprehensive strategy for efficiently resolving the issue of millions of refugees at its soil. An eloquent, result-oriented and exclusive debate amid the politicians, academics and foreign policy specialists for meticulously deliberating upon such a highly complex and frustrating challenge would help resolving this issue. There is certainly a necessity for doable roadmap demonstrating an explicit and exclusive solution strategy for the possibly earliest repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan.

The corresponding forums in Pakistan need to work for the consensus on the issue of Afghan refugees then they ought to share this viable stratagem with the Afghan authorities, the UNHCR and the global powers and particularly the rising players in the region. Such exclusive efforts would help in resolving the paramount challenge of repatriation and resettlement of millions of Afghans helplessly lying in the neighboring countries for four decades. The phenomena of voluntary repatriation would be beyond imagination without the true participation of all key stakeholders, primarily that of the regional actors. Neither Pakistan nor Afghanistan alone or even collectively have the capacity to resolve the enormous challenge of accommodating several millions Afghan refugees. Therefore, they ought to invite and encourage the international community, mainly some of the unconventional actors for their substantial assistance. Afghanistan shall have to emphasis on issues like reconstruction, capacity building of its economy, law and order and the overall security situation, and other key institutions.

Pakistan requires reinforcing its border management system at various crossing points; else its foe actors on the Afghan side may simply intrude into Pakistan pretending to be the Afghan refugees and challenge the overall law and order and security of the country. Every four out of five refugees in Pakistan come from the eastern districts of Afghanistan, which are ethnically Pashtuns and they can crossover the border on daily basis without stringent control. The Afghans have been exploiting the loose border-management as readily available facility for their seasonal migration, business activities and job opportunities, even on daily basis. It is exceedingly essential for the overall internal security of Pakistan to reinforce the border control management, predominantly at Torkhum and Chaman, the

two busiest crossing points at the Pak-Afghan border. The continued civil war in Afghanistan has always resulted power vacuum and a room for institutional resurrection. The infrastructure has to be revamped; skilled workforce is the need of the hour in order to contribute in the nation building of Afghanistan; rather than being either IDPs in the country or always trying to get refuge in the neighboring states, specifically Pakistan.

In the end, this study highlights that the presence of millions of Afghans on the Pakistani soil is a colossal encumbrance for the host nation that obviously does not possess the exclusive capacity of handling this enormous issue alone. The protracted challenge of repatriating millions of Afghans necessitates some concrete measures pertaining to the sharing of responsibility by various stakeholders. The phenomena of 'Voluntary Repatriation' as desired and demanded by the international community deem greater responsibility and support from the major international actors. Undoubtedly, in the present situation, the national interest of Pakistan demands that the notion of voluntariness is unrealistic and unachievable.

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